AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

R. Paul James for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling presented on December 8, 2023.

Title: A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of Tabletop Role-Playing Game Blogging

Abstract approved: ___________________________________________________________________________

Cass Dykeman

Tabletop role-playing games (TRPG) such as Dungeons & Dragons™ are widely known and enjoyed by diverse individuals across the world. However, TRPGs and their players historically have experienced significant stigmatization due to the misconception by some that fantasy role play leads to psychological dysfunction. While a large body of research exists to the contrary, many mental health professionals still believe that TRPG players are at higher risk for mental health concerns. These studies have the potential to contrast this misconception by offering insight into how this community resembles as well as contrasts the general population psychologically and linguistically. The objective of this dissertation research was twofold. The first manuscript used a computer-assisted text analysis design to analyze the TRPG blogging discourse by comparing it to blogging in general via 17 variables from three categories: broad psycholinguistic processes (authenticity, clout, tone, and analytic), linguistic processes (1st-person singular pronouns, 3rd-person singular pronouns, 1st-person plural pronouns, and 3rd-person plural pronouns), and psychological processes (positive emotion, negative emotion, friend, affiliation, achievement, power, reward, risk, and leisure). The variables were selected
based on a review of the literature regarding psychology and TRPGs. Regarding the broad psycholinguistic variables, the results indicated the largest differences between the corpora in the analytic and authentic variables. One linguistic variable, 1st-person singular pronouns, also showed significant difference. The results indicate that TRPG bloggers' discourse differs from blogging in general in their emphasis on resolving interpersonal conflict in the gameplay process. Understanding these themes in TRPG blogging discourse provides deeper insight into the worldview of these individuals, which might assist counselors in building cultural competence in working with this population. The second manuscript used a different corpus linguistic technique to identify the keywords, multiword terms, and the word networks of the keywords that differentiate TRPG blogging from blogging in general. The keyness analysis identified the words “dnd” and “homebrew” as the two keywords and “bonus action” and “spell slot” as the multiword terms that differentiated TRPG blogging from blogging in general. The word networks of “dnd” and “homebrew” emphasized both the unique lexicon of TRPG play, as well as the emphasis on group dynamics in this form of play. These results emphasize the creative potential of TRPG play along with the commitment players feel towards ensuring that gameplay is fair and enjoyable for everyone involved. Counselors and other mental health professionals can use the findings of these studies to increase their knowledge of the values and worldviews of the TRPG player community. This could also help clinicians provide more culturally competent care and harness the creative potential of TRPGs in the therapeutic process.
Doctor of Philosophy dissertation of R. Paul James presented on December 8, 2023

APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing Counseling

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Dean of the College of Education

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

__________________________
R. Paul James, Author
As I complete my dissertation, I would first and foremost like to thank my advisor, Dr. Cass Dykeman, for his mentorship in this process. Our weekly supervision meetings transformed the way I viewed the process of research and academic writing. I no longer feel daunted by the prospect of research; rather, I feel empowered to move forward into my career in academia. I would extend this gratitude to my committee, whose input and support was invaluable in my writing process. I especially appreciate Dr. Deborah Rubel, who also had a profound impact on my approach to academic writing and research. I’ll keep thinking in “cave person” language in all my future writing endeavors.

I also am acutely aware that I would not be here without my Cohort 71 colleagues. It has been a privilege to spend the past several years on this adventure with you all. I am especially grateful for the lifelong friends I’ve gained in this process. I look forward to many more adventures together. Remember that we’re almost there. Just a little bit further!

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DEDICATION

For Charlotte and Wesley.
My guiding light and the center of my joy.
Chapter 1: A General Introduction
Since 1974, the fantasy tabletop role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons™(D&D) has inspired individuals “tired of merely reading tales about worlds of magic, monsters, and adventure” (Crawford, 2014, p. 5) to turn those worlds into a playground for their imaginations. Described by the New York Times as an “element of pop cultural consciousness” (Diamond, 2022, para. 3), the games’ increasing popularity culminated in the recent production of a feature length film that follows a storyline similar to one players might use in their own gameplay (Daley & Goldstein, 2023). Recent research in the counseling field urges practitioners to harness the power of D&D to spark creative collaborations and model appropriate social interactions in their work with clients (Henrich & Worthington, 2021).

However, other lines of research point to outdated biases that persist among mental health providers, associating individuals who play D&D and other role-playing games with psychological dysfunction (Ben-Ezra et al., 2018; Lis et al., 2015). This dissertation research aims to address this issue by increasing understanding of individuals who play games such as D&D through corpus linguistics methods. This analysis will offer insight into the communication patterns of D&D players via their discussion of gameplay in online blogs. Both counselors and D&D community members stand to benefit from a better understanding of the unique psychological and linguistic characteristics within the discourse of this unique group.

**Guide to Chapter 1**

This chapter is to orient the reader to the research topic and to ground the research rationale in the context of the counseling profession. This is accomplished by connecting the research to accreditation standards in counselor education and supervision. The next section offers a brief review of the relevant literature before transitioning directly to the research questions, methodology, and publication goals for both manuscripts within this manuscript-style dissertation. The chapter then offers a glossary of key terms and thematic connections between the manuscripts before concluding with an overview of the rest of the dissertation.
Relationship of Dissertation Topic to CACREP Standards

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2023) standard 3.B.2 says that a part of counselor core knowledge must include understanding “the influence of heritage, cultural identities, attitudes, values, beliefs, understandings, within-group differences, and acculturative experiences on individuals’ worldviews.” The tabletop role-playing games (TRPG) community represents a group of individuals with a unique subculture that has historically been misunderstood and often stigmatized by mental health professionals (Ascherman, 1993; Ben-Ezra et al., 2018; Lancaster, 1994; Leeds, 1995; Lis et al., 2015; Martin & Fine, 1991). This research aimed to broaden the level of knowledge available to counselors who may working with this population.

State of Scientific Knowledge Regarding Dissertation Topic

An overview of the literature regarding the D&D TRPG blogging community revealed nine key themes: (a) key definitions associated with TRPGs, (b) the existing research regarding the D&D TRPG, (c) the existing research regarding D&D TRPG blogging, (d) key definitions associated with corpus linguistics, (e) the existing research related to broad psycholinguistic processes and TRPGs, (f) the existing research regarding linguistic processes and TRPGs, (g) the existing research regarding psychological processes and TRPGs, (h) the existing research regarding collocation and TRPGs, and (i) the existing research regarding keyness and TRPGs.

Three definitions related to TRPGs require explanation to understand the present study. The first is role-playing game (RPG), which refers to a game that operates based on the players acting out the role of a character during gameplay (Montola, 2009). The second definition specifies a type of RPG designated as TRPGs, which are RPGs played by a small group of participants who collaboratively tell a story and solve problems while role-playing their characters in a fictional setting (White et al., 2018). The third term is D&D, a specific type of TRPG (Crawford, 2014). Created by Gary Gygax and Dave
Arneson in 1974, D&D is often identified as the seminal RPG game that provided rules and structures from which the mechanics of many future RPGs were derived.

The literature regarding RPGs and TRPGs spans multiple fields of academic inquiry. For example, Dionnet et al. (2008) used role-playing games in combination with other exercises to help Moroccan farmers learn ways to navigate the impact of political, socioeconomic, and environmental changes on their livelihoods. In contrast, some modern philosophers view TRPGs such as D&D as a metaphorical playground for moral discourse and existential meaning-making (Robichaud & Irwin, 2014). Resurgence of interest in TRPG play led to the recent exploration of the therapeutic uses of role-playing in the counseling process (Henrich & Worthington, 2021). Despite the breadth and depth of this inquiry, little data exist regarding the ways in which TRPG players interact with one another in online forums.

The closest approximation to research on TRPG blogging emerges from the discourse surrounding massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), the modern, digital iteration of the RPG (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). The emerging data suggest that MMORPG players form online communities revolving around specific gaming brands that invoke a sense of loyalty and belonging to the game and those who play it (Sierra et al., 2016). Some researchers argue that lessons learned from the participatory cultures of MMORPGs could be harnessed by educators to increase student engagement and enhance instruction (Curry, 2010). Others point out the potential role of MMORPGs in second language learning (Zhang et al., 2017). MMORPG research suggests that much could be learned from an in-depth exploration of the dialogue between TRPG players.

Corpus linguistics, the study of language via analysis of word usage patterns in a body of text, provide an ideal medium for analyzing the interaction between TRPG players in online forums. For example, the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count-22 (LIWC-22; Boyd et al., 2022) software examines the usage of particular words in a body of text to determine psychological, linguistic, and psycholinguistic characteristics of the writers. Other methodologies allow researchers to identify words that distinguish
one body of discussion from another. **Keyness** refers to one such methodology that identifies keywords used at higher frequencies in one text sample compared to another (Bondi, 2008). **Collocation** is often used along with keyness to analyze groups of words used in significant patterns in a text (Brezina, 2018). These corpus linguistics techniques could offer unique insights into the discourse of TRPG bloggers.

Although no specific research exists applying corpus linguistic analysis such as LIWC-22’s psycholinguistic processes (Boyd et al., 2022) to TRPG blogging, research in related fields indicate that psycholinguistic analysis of a group’s discourse could yield meaningful insight into the characteristics of that group (Behnke et al., 2021; Buckingham & Nusiebah, 2020). This could be especially meaningful for TRPG players, who often find social interaction and community building to be a primary motivator for participation (Coe, 2017). For example, Nguyen et al. (2014) found that psycholinguistic analysis of topical discussion in online communities could be used to distinguish the discourse of groups whose members reported experiencing problems such as depression from control groups. Similarly, Monzani et al. (2020) used psycholinguistic variables to track a significant shift in the emotional tone of online discourse during the most intense months of the COVID-19 pandemic. These data suggest that similar insights could be gained by applying this methodology to the discourse of the TRPG blogging community.

Similar to psycholinguistic processes, no specific research exists examining the linguistic processes used by TRPG bloggers. However, proximal research indicates that use of linguistic markers in a group’s discourse could hold relevant implications for both group members as well as counselors. For example, Wolf et al. (2013) found that individuals who blog about their experiences with eating disorders strongly rely on the use of first-person singular pronouns, which seems to be a function of the purpose of the blog. By contrast, TRPG players often tout the communal nature and intent of gameplay (Adams, 2013). Further exploration of the linguistic processes could provide insight into whether the relational nature of TRPG play is reflected in the discourse of TRPG bloggers.
Psychological processes remain another unexplored frontier in the world of TRPG blogging but not blogging in general. For example, Ngwenya et al. (2009) found that individuals with terminal illnesses rely heavily on psychological process words as they make sense of their experience via blogging. Additionally, Holtzman et al. (2019) found that individuals with identified narcissistic personality traits are significantly less likely to use words related to anxiety or indecision in their social media posts. These data may be of particular interest to TRPG bloggers, as research suggests that players use TRPGs for identity exploration and development (Bowman & Schier, 2018).

Collocation, a corpus linguistic methodology focused on identifying words often used together in a text (Brezina, 2018), provides another lens through which to analyze the discourse of TRPG bloggers. Once again, research on collocation and blogging in general provides a window into the possible insights offered by this tool. For example, Moyeen et al. (2021) analyzed word collocates on Twitter to classify the positive and negative emotions of users towards products, ideas, and current events. Collocation analysis of TRPG blogging could potentially reveal unique insights about the values of this community.

Keyness also offers potential to shed light on the unique characteristics of the TRPG blogging community. Focused on the identification of keywords used in high frequency within a text, keyness allows researchers to identify words that dominate the landscape of a community’s discourse (Bondi, 2008). Although no existing research examines keyness in the TRPG blogging community, this tool has been used to analyze other blogging communities. Keyword analysis of pro-eating disorder blogs identified keywords distinguishing the ways individuals from this community talk about their personal experiences versus people they identify as adversarial to their cause (Lukač, 2011). Research on online role-playing games indicates that RPG players develop their own language usage patterns, which can be used as both means and motivation for nonnative speakers to learn the English language (Peterson, 2010). These findings hint at potential benefits of corpus linguistic analysis of TRPG blogging discourse.

**Description of Research Manuscript 1**
Statement of Research Questions

Five questions directed the course of inquiry in this study. The first was, What was the level of use of broad psycholinguistic processes in the tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) blogging community? The second was, What was the level of use of linguistic processes in the TRPG blogging community? The third was, What was the level of use of psychological processes in the TRPG blogging community? The fourth was, What linguistic processes distinguish the discourse in the TRPG blogging community from blogging in general? The fifth was, What psychological processes distinguish the discourse in the TRPG blogging community from blogging in general?

Brief Overview of Method

This study examined the psychological and linguistic characteristics of the discourse of the D&D RPG community by analyzing text samples taken from related discussion forums on the website Reddit. Analyses were conducted using LIWC-22, which analyzes word usage patterns across three categories: broad psycholinguistic, linguistic, and psychological (Boyd et al., 2022b). The patterns identified across 17 variables in the study corpus were then compared to data collected by LIWC-22 developers corresponding to all posts made on Reddit (Boyd et al., 2022a). This method revealed differences in psychological, linguistic, and psycholinguistic patterns between the two corpuses.

Brief Overview of Data Analysis

The first three research questions involved using descriptive statistics regarding word usage in the study corpus, which the LIWC-22 software generates. RQs 4–5 involved comparing the proportions of the word tokens associated with the study variables between the study and reference corpuses. The log likelihood ratio ($G^2$) was used for comparisons with alpha level set at $p < .001$. The Bayesian information criteria (BIC) provided a means of analyzing the level of evidence for the null and alternative hypotheses, BIC descriptors were derived from Wilson (2013), and all analyses were performed using R (Wilson, 2013).
Target Journal

The target journal for the first manuscript is *The Professional Counselor*. Focused on innovations in counseling research, theory, and practice, *The Professional Counselor* is an open access electronic journal published by the National Board for Certified Counselors. This journal does not publish any data about its impact factor.

*The Professional Counselor* publishes articles in the intersection of popular culture, counseling, and multicultural competence. For example, Volume 10, Issue 2, included an article titled, “Toward Culturally Competent School Counseling Environments: Hip-Hop Studio Construction.” In this article, Levy and Adjapong (2020) conducted a qualitative exploration of student experiences in a Hip-Hop lyric writing class.

Preregistration, Preparing, and Open Science Plan

The research questions for this manuscript have been preregistered with the Open Science Foundation using the AsPredicted.org template (https://osf.io/x2hev/). The preprint of the completed article manuscript will be deposited with PsyArXiv (https://psyarxiv.com/). Sherpa/Romeo reports no information on preprint restrictions listed for the target journal (https://v2.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/). Finally, this manuscript will bear the following Open Science badges: Preregistered, Open Data, and Open Materials (https://www.cos.io/initiatives/badges).

Description of Research Manuscript 2

Statement of Research Questions

Four questions directed the course of this study. The first was, In comparison to blogging in general, what words occur more frequently in RPG community blogging? The second was, In comparison to blogging in general, what words occur less frequently in RPG community blogging? The third was, What is the word network of the word that most distinguished the RPG community’s blogging from
blogging in general? The fourth was, What is the word network of the word that was second in distinguishing the RPG community’s blogging from blogging in general?

**Brief Overview of Method**

This study analyzed the word usage patterns of the D&D blogging community using keyness and collocation. This methodology was used to identify words that are unique to the D&D blogging community compared to blogging in general. Collocation refers to words that occur in close proximity to node words within a text more often than can be explained by random chance. In this study, the keywords identified in the first half of the study served as the node words around which collocates were located.

**Brief Overview of Data Analysis**

For RQs 1–2, both descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated using software from Sketch Engine (Sketch Engine, 2023c). The descriptive statistics included the top 10 keywords from each corpus, as well as their frequency and dispersion (raw and normalized) across the study corpus. The inferential statistics involved comparing proportions of each keyword between the study and reference corpuses using the simple maths formula (Sketch Engine, 2023d). Average logarithmic distance frequency (ALDF; Sketch Engine, 2023b) was also calculated to account for unequal word distribution across the corpuses. Finally, RQs 3–4 used logDice to analyze collocations within the study corpus.

**Target Journal**

The target journal for the second manuscript is the *International Journal of Role-Playing*, which aims to serve as a platform for the academic discussion and analysis of role-playing games. The *International Journal of Role-Playing* is independently published by an international editorial board. This journal does not have a published impact factor.

The *International Journal of Role-Playing* regularly publishes articles on the intersection of counseling and role-playing games. For example, Issue 10 included an article titled, “A Qualitative
Exploration of the Perceived Social Benefits of Playing Table-top Role-playing Games,” in which Orr et al. (2020) conducted a mixed methods analysis of players' experiences of the social aspects of RPG play.

**Preregistration, Preparing and Open Science Plan**

The research questions for this manuscript have been preregistered with the Open Science Foundation using the AsPredicted.org template (https://osf.io/x2hev/). The preprint of the completed article manuscript will be deposited with PsyArXiv (https://psyarxiv.com/). Sherpa/Romeo reports no information on preprint restrictions listed for the target journal (https://v2.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/). Finally, this manuscript will bear the following Open Science badges: Preregistered, Open Data, and Open Materials (https://www.cos.io/initiatives/badges).

**Specialized Glossary**

This glossary outlines the terms used in this study, specifically vocabulary unique to corpus linguistics studies as well as terms associated with role-playing games.

*Average logarithmic distance frequence (ALDF):* ALDF is a statistical analysis designed to assess the distribution of word usage throughout a corpus so that words occurring in only one portion of a corpus do not unduly influence the overall analysis of said corpus (Sketch Engine, 2023a).

*Collocation:* Collocation is a corpus linguistics methodology focused on identifying word use, such as frequency and proximity in a body of text (Brezina, 2018).

*Corpus linguistics:* Corpus linguistics refers to the study of the ways in which individuals and groups use language by analyzing word usage and grammatical patterns (Baker et al., 2006).

*Corpus/corpuses:* Corpus refers to the sample of text being analyzed in a corpus linguistics study. Corpuses is the plural form.

*Dungeons & Dragons (D&D):* Dungeons & Dragons is a specific tabletop role-playing game that uses a published set of rules and story outlines to guide players as they interact during game play (Crawford, 2014).
*Keyness:* Keyness is a corpus linguistics methodology used to determine what words are considered keywords in corpus (Bondi, 2008).

*Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count-22 (LIWC-22):* LIWC-22 is a corpus linguistics tool that allows users to determine psychological, linguistic, and psycholinguistic characteristics of individuals and groups by comparing their language use to its own word database (Boyd et al., 2022).

*logDice:* The measure logDice is used to identify how often two words appear together in a corpus. It measures both the frequency of the node word and the collocate, as well as their co-occurrence in the sample (Sketch Engine, 2023b).

*Log-likelihood test:* Commonly used in keyword analysis, the log-likelihood test examines two corpora to determine whether a significant difference in word frequency exists between them (Pojanapunya & Todd, 2018).

*Node:* Node refers to a central word or words around which other words are frequently grouped in a corpus (Sketch Engine, 2023c).

*Role-playing game (RPG):* A role-playing game is a type of game in which the player designs a character whose choices and goals they control during the game (Zagal & Deterding, 2018).

*Simple maths:* Simple maths is a method of identifying key words as well as collocations by comparing frequencies of word usage in a study corpus compared to a reference corpus (Sketch Engine, 2023d).

*Tabletop role-playing game (TRPG):* A tabletop role-playing games is a subgenre of RPG in which players create characters that they control as a part of a group gaming experience, usually set around a table, during which they collaborate to solve problems and tell a story (White et al., 2018).

**Thematic Linkage of Manuscripts**

The study corpuses serve as the primary link between the two manuscripts, as both focus on understanding aspects of the discourse of TRPG players in online web blogs. Specifically, the
manuscripts analyze the same study corpus to determine various psychological and linguistic characteristics of the individuals contributing to said corpus. This linkage extends to the methodology used for data analysis, both of which are unique to the field of corpus linguistics. Finally, both manuscripts aim to increase awareness of the unique features of this group to assist counselors in their clinical work with TRPG players.

**Organization of Manuscript**

The first chapter provides an overview of the entire dissertation. The second chapter consists of Manuscript 1, which used LIWC-22 (Boyd et al., 2022) to analyze psycholinguistic characteristics of TRPG players online blogging discourse. In the third chapter, Manuscript 2 analyzes the same corpus of TRPG online blogging for keywords and collocations. The fourth chapter includes the results of both studies as well as possible implications for the field of counseling. The bibliography and appendices follow these chapters.
References


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Chapter 2: Manuscript 1
Rolling for Insight: Psychological and Linguistic Features of Role-Playing Game Online Discussion

Forums

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Abstract

Individuals who enjoy tabletop role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons™ have historically been the focus of significant stigmatization in both popular culture as well as in mental health circles. This stigma lingers in some clinical circles despite a plethora of evidence pointing to the positive outcomes correlated with TRPG play. The present study used computer-assisted text analysis to compare a sample corpus of the discourse of TRPG bloggers to general blogging discourse by using 17 variables from three categories: broad psycholinguistic processes (authenticity, clout, tone, and analytic), linguistic processes (1st-person singular pronouns, 3rd-person singular pronouns, 1st-person plural pronouns, and 3rd-person plural pronouns), and psychological processes (positive emotion, negative emotion, friend, affiliation, achievement, power, reward, risk, and leisure). The results indicated the largest difference between the corpora in the authentic and analytic psycholinguistic variables, as well as significant difference in the use of the first-person singular linguistic process. The findings suggest that TRPG bloggers discourse focuses on problem-solving related to the interpersonal demands presented in this unique form of gameplay. This insight adds to the available knowledge regarding the TRPG community, which may increase the cultural competence of counselors and other clinicians working with this unique group.

Keywords: LIWC, corpus linguistics, tabletop role-playing games, Dungeons & Dragons
Rolling for Insight: Psychological and Linguistic Features of Role-Playing Game Online Discussion

“What does this title in italics refer to? A blog post? A conspiracy theory? The rantings of a cranky
parent? Actually, it is the title of an editorial that appeared in the School Library Journal in 1991
(Caywood, 1991). Most individuals no longer see tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) as corruptors of
the hearts and minds of wholesome youth; however, some mental health professionals still consider
them an unhealthy hobby and an indicator of psychological dysfunction. Sentiment in academic
literature has hardly improved since this point.

There was a twofold purpose for the present study. First, the study addressed a gap in the
literature by inquiring into previously unexplored domains of research (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2010).
Although corpus linguistics studies have been used to analyze diverse topics such as deception (Newman
et al., 2003), social hierarchies (Kacewicz et al., 2013), and U.S. presidential discourse (Chen & Hu, 2019),
no existing studies used this methodology to examine the discourse of TRPG players. The research
question addressed this gap and contributes to the broader discourse surrounding TRPG games and
counseling. The second aim of this study was to disrupt current practice in the counseling community by
broadening clinician knowledge of TRPGs (Terwiel, 2020). Past research reflects a cultural bias in which
role playing is associated with psychopathology and deviant behavior (Ascherman, 1993; Lancaster,
1994; Leeds, 1995; Martin & Fine, 1991). More recent studies suggest that some mental health
providers still think of TRPG players as possessing social ineptitude or even a diagnosable psychological
disorder (Ben-Ezra et al., 2018; Lis et al., 2015).

The historical and continued marginalization of the TRPG community by professional counselors
stands in direct contrast to personological research on this group. For example, TRPGs serve roles such
as helping players maintain friendships (Adams, 2013), strengthen moral reasoning (Wright et al., 2017),
and better understanding themselves and others (Coe, 2017). This contrast highlights how increased
awareness of the benefits of TRPG play could encourage more counselors to embrace the positive role of TRPGs in their clients’ lives. Linguistic analysis of the discourse of this community could allow counselors to increase their competence and knowledge around the unique culture and possible benefits of TRPG play, thereby helping them practice within the framework of social justice and multicultural competence (Ratts et al., 2015).

This need for increased awareness of the TRPG community in counseling circles is further reinforced by demographic research revealing some interesting aspects of this group and its heterogeneity. The Wizards of the Coast, the parent company of the D&D franchise, reported in 2020 that more people were playing D&D than ever before (Wieland, 2021). Of the 50 million players to date, 60% identified as male and 40% as female, with >1% identifying as other/nonbinary. The company also reported diverse age ranges in players, with 12% 15–19 years old, 24% 20–24 years old, 18% 25–29 years old, 18% 30–34 years old, 14% 35–39, and 13% over 39 years old. These data correlate with broader demographic research indicating that RPG players come from diverse and varied backgrounds, in contrast with what Curran (2011) articulates as the stereotypical representations of gamers as “anti-social male teenagers who are largely more interested in technology than in their own personal appearance” (p. 44). It is likely that many counselors have worked with an RPG player, with or without awareness of this fact.

In preparing the research questions and to ground the selection of variables in science, the authors explored the academic literature on this topic along seven themes. These themes were: (a) key definitions related to TRPGs, (b) what data exists about the Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) TRPG, (c) key definitions related to corpus linguistics, (d) what research exists about broad psycholinguistic processes and TRPGs, (e) what research exists about linguistic processes and TRPGs, (f) what research exists about psychological processes and TRPGs, and (g) D&D TRPG blogging. After discussing these themes, the research questions guiding the present study are detailed.
The definitions of three key terms offer context new to this field of inquiry. The first is role-playing games (RPGs), which the literature generally defines as a shared play activity in which players design a character that they can then control during gameplay, with a variety of opportunities for creativity regarding the goals pursued and choices made (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). This activity takes place in multiple formats, which leads to the second key term, tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs). This style of role-playing game occurs in small groups in which participants collaborate to tell stories and solve problems, usually sitting around a shared table (White et al., 2018). The third key term refers to the specific type of TRPG being researched, which is named Dungeons & Dragons™ (D&D; Crawford, 2014). D&D is a popular iteration of TRPGs that provides structure to the game play through a published set of rules to guide player interactions. With these key definitions explicated, the focus can now turn to the research.

The research on RPGs is extensive and varied. Tabletop games such as D&D (Crawford, 2014) are the progenitors of a larger group of RPGs that includes live-action role-playing games (Harviainen et al., 2018), single-player computer role-playing games (Schules et al., 2018), multiplayer online role-playing games (Chen et al., 2018), and online freeform role-playing games (Hammer, 2018). Researchers have examined the interactions of RPGs within diverse fields such as literary studies (Jara & Torner, 2018), economics (Knowles & Castronova, 2018), science and technology (Bienia, 2018), psychology (Bowman & Lieberoth, 2018), sociology (Williams et al., 2018), communication (White, 2018), and performance studies (Hoover et al., 2018). Additionally, many RPGs gather a following of fans who form into corresponding subcultures, or fandoms, which inspire further inquiry (MacCallum-Steward & Trammell, 2018). Despite this saturation of content, gaps become apparent in the literature regarding content domains such as the specific RPGs.

In many ways, the literature specific to the D&D game reflects the broader themes of research on RPGs. For example, recent scholarship in philosophy uses D&D as a medium to reflect on themes
such as moral development (Littman, 2014; Miles & Hess, 2014; Mussett, 2014), existentialism (Crandall & Taliaferro, 2014), imagination and fiction (Delfino & Hillock, 2014), sex and gender (Mussett, 2014), and friendship (Nicholas, 2014). Scholars in a range of fields such as literature, anthropology, and theology have also connected D&D with concepts such as racial and gender identity (Garcia, 2017), misogyny (Stang & Trammell, 2020), and political theology (Hollander, 2021). Even mathematicians have shown interest in the theoretical implications of D&D’s use of polyhedral dice as a part of gameplay mechanics (Lai & Musiker, 2020). Ultimately, the research most pertinent to the present study lies within the confluence of psychology, linguistics, D&D, and its fellow TRPGs.

Before delving into the research on linguistics and TRPGs, several key terms require definitions. The first term is *corpus linguistics* (CL) itself, which is defined as the study of language used in everyday life through the analysis of a corpus, or a compiled sample of textual data (Baker et al., 2006). Various branches of corpus linguistics use computer programs to analyze patterns of word usage, such as frequency and pairing within a text sample. One methodology offers insight into psychological characteristics of a group by analyzing their word usage via the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-22) software (Boyd et al., 2022). LIWC-22 sorts text samples into three categories: broad psycholinguistic processes, linguistic processes, and psychological processes. Each of these categories provides insight into a different aspect of language use. For example, linguistic processes denote how often writers use singular versus plural pronouns, while psychological processes refer to the use of words associated with positive or negative emotions. Broad psycholinguistic processes, which emerged during the development of the LIWC software, indicate patterns of word usage associated with the ways authors use language to communicate emotional tone, honesty, or power dynamics. Tools such as LIWC-22 provide a means to gain insight about group characteristics through the analysis of their written discourse.

Research indicates that broad psycholinguistic processes used in a group’s discourse can offer
insight into the perspectives of its members (Pennebaker et al., 2015). For example, a grounded theory of motivation to engage in TRPG play suggests that players experience TRPGs as a space to explore their identity, social interactions, and creativity (Coe, 2017). These themes align closely with the LIWC-22 (Boyd et al., 2022) broad psycholinguistic processes of authenticity and clout, which are associated with openness and social status, respectively. One possible application comes from Vaughn (2019), who found higher clout scores in the discourse of individuals focused on self-determination and personal growth. Connections such as these convey the potential descriptive power of the LIWC broad psycholinguistic processes for TRPG participants.

Linguistic processes within group discourse can also provide insight into the experiences of individuals within that group. For example, Ireland et al. (2011) found that in relational dyads, linguistic style matching in the use of pronouns increased the likelihood of long-term stability in the relationship. Conversely, Blackburn et al. (2014) found that 1st-person pronoun use serves as a predictor for relationship disillusionment. A more recent exploration suggests that words marking LIWC’s broad psycholinguistic variable “tone” can be used to identify patterns of individuals seeking social support versus autonomy (Vaughn, 2019). These insights could prove to be relevant to TRPG players, who value the opportunities provided by gameplay for relationship development (Adams, 2013). Further exploration of the linguistic processes within TRPG group discourse might provide similar information about this community.

Psychological processes within a group’s discourse can provide information about the social, emotional, and cognitive experiences of group members (Pennebaker et al., 2015). Research suggests that the use of words related to negative emotion can be associated with behavioral traits such as power-seeking, self-absorption, and dishonesty (Yuan et al., 2020). Conversely, Chen et al. (2020) connected the use of positive emotion words to extraversion. These findings could be particularly useful to TRPG players, who often use gameplay as a means of exploring their identity and sense of belonging.
Linguistic analysis of TRPG player discourse could support these individuals in pursuing these important goals.

The online blogging community provides a unique opportunity to study the discourse and ultimately the worldview of TRPG players. Although little research exists scrutinizing the web content of the TRPG community, research on internet cultures indicates that virtual communities act as platforms for self-expression and social interaction (Kirmayer et al., 2013). For example, Bawa (2018) found that online gamers create language patterns unique to their own game subcultures. Carrillo Masso (2009) also found notable linguistic differences by gender in the online discourse surrounding massive multiplayer online RPGs. Studying these patterns within TRPG blogging could offer similar insights to players as well as the scholarly community.

Given the literature, five questions were developed to guide this study:

RQ1: What was the level of use of broad psycholinguistic processes in the tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) community?
RQ2: What was the level of use of linguistic processes in the TRPG blogging community?
RQ3: What was the level of use of psychological processes in the TRPG blogging community?
RQ4: What linguistic processes distinguish the discourse in the TRPG blogging community from blogging in general?
RQ5: What psychological processes distinguish the discourse in the TRPG blogging community from blogging in general?

Preregistration of these research questions can be found at https://osf.io/vdg9b.

Method

Design

This study analyzed blogging using a corpus linguistic design (Weisser, 2016). There were 17 variables spread across three categories: broad psycholinguistic, linguistic, and psychological (Boyd et
al., 2022). The corpus consisted of public posts from the website Reddit made by individuals discussing TRPGs both as players and as dungeon masters (i.e. game facilitators). The level of measurement for all variables was continuous. The unit of analysis was words. Because the data were pulled from public websites and no identifiers were collected (e.g., geolocation), human subjects review was not required.

**Study Corpus**

**Register, Scope, and Sources**

The register for this corpus was blogging, and the subregister was blogging about D&D. The scope was the last 1,000 public posts made as of May 30, 2023, which amounted to approximately three weeks of posts in the forum. The source was extracted from interactive forums on the website Reddit. Several forums, called subreddits, focus on discussions surrounding topics specific to TRPGs such as D&D 5e©. Specific subreddits included r/dndnext and r/DnD5e. Reddit’s application programming interface (API) system was used to gather the posts to construct a corpus. The subreddits scraped included posts in which individuals discussed their experiences role-playing characters while playing D&D.

**Preprocessing**

The corpus was scraped from an interactive forum and was programmed to examine text related to the user’s discussion of their role-playing experience. The API scraped the last 1,000 posts that used monolingual English and consisted of 90% valid English words according to the English Wiktionary. The API software then saved the posts in a .csv file for analysis. The software eliminated the following while collecting the text: usernames, location of the posts, posts from outside the United States, photographs, foreign languages, and hyperlinks. Any nonstandard orthography, including typing errors and spelling errors were also excluded.

**Reference Corpus**

**Register, Scope, and Sources**
The corpus used as a point of comparison for this study was the Reddit subcorpus of the LIWC-22 Test Kitchen Corpus (Boyd et al., 2022). The Test Kitchen corpus contains multiple genres that are grouped according to their content, such as speeches, which refers to transcripts of U.S. Congressional speeches, and applications made up of technical college admissions essays. The genre chosen for this study was Reddit, which was chosen because it most closely aligns with the register of the study corpus. The Reddit corpus consisted of 50,000 text files of individuals’ Reddit comments made on the r/askreddit subreddit between December 1, 2019, and February 15, 2020. Although the time frame of posts for this corpus is not identical to the study corpus, the Test Kitchen Reddit corpus provides a stable and easily accessible point of comparison, as all Reddit threads change daily due to new contributions from Redditors.

**Preprocessing**

The comparison corpus was downloaded from the Reddit subcorpus of the LIWC-22 Test Kitchen corpus (Boyd et al., 2022). As such, no preprocessing was done other than stopword removal.

**Measures**

*Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)*

**Overview.** LIWC-22 has 90 subscales it measures within any corpus (Boyd et al., 2022). Some scales focus specifically on linguistic processes, such as personal pronouns. Other scales focus on psychological processes such as anxiety. Other scales examine broad psycholinguistic variables (e.g., clout). For linguistics and psychological processes, the output is a normalized frequency (percentage of all words). The scores for broad psycholinguistic variables (e.g., clout) are in the form of percentiles based on standardized scores from large comparison samples. LIWC possesses adequate reliability and validity (Pennebaker et al., 2015).

**Broad Psycholinguistic Processes.** Four LIWC scales were used to measure broad psycholinguistic processes: analytical thinking, clout, authentic, and emotional tone (Pennebaker et al.,
Analytical thinking assesses complexity of thought in language via the ways in which individuals use functions words such as pronouns and articles to express their ideas (Pennebaker et al., 2014). Clout analyzes the ways language use reflects the social standing of the user (Kacewicz et al., 2013), and authentic can be used to detect deception within language patterns (Newman et al., 2003). Emotional tone assesses the level and type of emotions expressed in a language sample with higher scores representing warmer emotional tones (Cohn et al., 2004).

**Linguistic Processes.** Four LIWC scales were used to assess psychological processes. They were 1st-person singular (me), 1st-person plural (we), 3rd-person singular (he/she), and 3rd-person plural (their).

**Psychological Processes.** Nine LIWC scales were used to assess psychological processes. They were positive emotion (e.g., love), negative emotion (e.g., hurt), friend (e.g., buddy), affiliation (e.g., social), achievement (e.g., win), power (e.g., superior), reward (e.g., benefit), risk (e.g., danger), and leisure (e.g., fun).

**Apparatus**

LIWC-22 software, developed by Boyd et al. (2022), uses text analysis as a means of extrapolating data from the words people use regularly. LIWC-22 relies on a dictionary consisting of 6,400 items, which are grouped into 90 output variables dealing with language variables, linguistic dimensions, and psychological processes. Each word in a target text is analyzed and then matched with the appropriate linguistic or psychological construct. LIWC-22 also distinguishes between words (hungry) and their stems (hungr).

**Data Analysis**

RQs 1–3 were descriptive in nature. For RQ1, the mean and standard deviation of the standard scores were reported. Regarding RQs 2–3, both raw counts and normalized counts (percentage of all words) were reported. RQs 4–5 involved comparisons of proportions. The log likelihood ratio test ($G^2$)
was used for these comparisons with an alpha level set at $p < .001$. The effect size utilized was log ratio where a log ratio of 1 means the variable is twice as common in a corpus than it is in the reference corpus (Hardie, 2014). The Bayes information criterion (BIC) was employed to determine an approximation of the level of evidence for the null and alternative hypotheses. The BIC level of evidence descriptors were drawn from Wilson (2013). All analyses were conducted using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

**Results**

Regarding RQ1, the results were as follows: analytic = 62.60, clout = 36.53, authentic = 44.54, and emotional tone = 42.47. The largest differences between the two corpuses were in analytic, which had a $|27.39|$ difference, and authentic with a $|17.20|$ difference. Clout and tone showed a much smaller difference at $|5.13|$ and $|8.94|$, respectively. The full results for RQ 1 can be viewed in Table 2.1. Turning to RQs 2–5, several variables showed significant differences in linguistic and psychological variables between the two corpuses. The strongest difference was in the 1st-person singular pronouns ($G^2 = 17.52, p < .001, BIC = 4.79$), 3rd-person singular pronouns ($G^2 = 7.82, p < .01, BIC = -4.90$), and power ($G^2 = 8.50, p < .001, BIC = -4.22$). Full descriptive (RQs 2–3) and inferential (RQs 4–5) results can be found in Tables 2.2 and 2.3, respectively.

**Discussion**

This study aimed to examine the psycholinguistic features of TRPG player blogging discourse to help counselors better understand the unique features of this group. RQs 1–3 sought to provide descriptive results across a variety of linguistic and psychological variables. RQs 4–5 compared and contrasted the linguistic and psychological word usage patterns between TRPG blogging and a general blogging corpus. The results suggest that TRPG players use online blogging platforms in a goal-oriented way to solve problems encountered during gameplay. Since RQs 2 and 4 deal with different aspects of the same variables, they will be addressed as a set. The same is true for RQs 3 and 5.
RQ1 results revealed a larger percentage difference in the analytic and authentic psycholinguistic processes in TRPG bloggers discourse, with a much smaller difference in the clout and tone processes. One possible explanation for these findings is that TRPG bloggers use these platforms to problem solve issues that come up during gameplay with peers on the platform. As such, they may be more concerned with the logic of their argument and thus use fewer words advertising their honesty about the situations portrayed. This aligns with previous research correlating higher usage of words associated with the analytic variable with individuals attempting to provide precise descriptions of events or using storytelling for an argumentative purpose (Pennebaker et al., 2014). Another possible explanation of these results is that TRPG bloggers might be using these platforms to gain social status or validation of their own choices and are not concerned with establishing the veracity of their claims. Previous research on the authentic psycholinguistic process suggests that lower use of this process in a body of text, characterized by lower usage of self-reference words and higher use of negative emotion words, indicates dishonesty on the part of its authors (Newman et al., 2003). However, the TRPG blogging corpus also showed a higher level of use of the tone psycholinguistic process than the reference corpus, suggesting that TRPG bloggers use more positive emotion words than the general Reddit corpus (Boyd et al., 2022). Of the two explanations, the research provides stronger support for the first explanation linking the psycholinguistic process usage patterns with TRPG players using blogging platforms to outline their problems and seek support from peers.

Turning to RQs 2 and 4 (linguistic processes), the data point to significant differences in TRPG bloggers’ use of 1st-person singular pronouns compared to Reddit users in general. One possible explanation for this result is that TRPG bloggers use fewer pronouns such as “I” because they are more concerned about getting feedback about “we-related” problems due to the interpersonal complexities of TRPG play. Research supports this communal focus by emphasizing that TRPGs often serve as a medium for the maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Adams, 2013) and sense of belonging (Coe,
An alternative explanation for these results is that TRPG blogging discourse is less focused on 1st-person singular pronouns because it is more focused on the topic of TRPG play. Reviews of research on blogging indicate that a significant focus of blogging in general revolves around discussion and disclosure of self (Schmidt, 2007). Thus, the general Reddit corpus may have more self-references than the TRPG corpus because blog usage often focuses on 1st-person disclosure of feelings and experiences. Of these two explanations, the first explanation seems more likely. TRPG bloggers could choose to focus on disclosing aspects of their 1st-person experience of gameplay; however, the results suggest that the “I” is much less important than the “we” or “they” to TRPG players.

With regard to RQs 3 and 5 (psychological processes), the results indicated little difference in usage patterns of the identified variables between the study and reference corpuses. One possible explanation for these results is that psychological variables such as affiliation, leisure, and positive or negative emotion are relevant to all Reddit users, not just those who use the platform to discuss TRPGs. This explanation resonates with academic inquiry on the topic which suggests that, to some degree, all Reddit use revolves around finding a community of individuals with whom to discuss a topic of interest (Anderson, 2015). From this perspective, the Reddit discourse of another group on a different topic might equally involve words relating to affiliation due to the nature of the platform. Another possible explanation is that individuals who blog about TRPG play are not all that different from individuals blogging about their problems with co-workers or relationships. This explanation resonates with both popular discourse about the broad popularity of TRPGs as well as demographic data suggesting that individuals from a variety of backgrounds and social intersections enjoy TRPG play (Wieland, 2021). Of these two explanations, the second explanation that TRPGs are for everyone fits with both the results as well as the broader research in this field.

These results offer insight into the unique psycholinguistic characteristics of TRPG players; however, several areas of limitation also emerge from this discussion. First and foremost, the
generalizability of these results is limited by the scope of the study corpus. The sampling method of the last 1,000 subreddit posts presents the limitation that some unique temporal phenomenon may have influenced the usage patterns on Reddit to the degree that this sample is not representative of TRPG blogging discourse as a whole. Additionally, limiting the posts scraped to only those using monolingual English also means that the data only represents those individuals using English fluently on Reddit. This leads to the secondary consideration that TRPG blogging discourse may not accurately represent the discourse of all individuals who enjoy this form of gameplay. Another limitation lies in the psycholinguistic variables used to compare the two corpora. Although a review of relevant literature guided the process, the selection of variables for analysis relied ultimately on the insight and interpretation of the researchers. Researcher bias may have impacted both the selection of the variables, as well as interpretation of the results that limits the degree to which they represent the TRPG blogging community.

This review of limitations also provides insight regarding other possible avenues of inquiry. One way to increase the level of insight offered would be to repeat this study using a broader sample of blogging discourse, such as additional subreddits focused on D&D or other RPGs such as Pathfinder™ (Bonner et al., 2017). A future study corpus might also include a larger sample of text by scraping text several times over a period to reduce any impact of temporal phenomenon. A combination of mixed qualitative and quantitative methodologies presents another way to reduce the impact of researcher bias and increase generalizability of findings. For example, conducting member checks might help to align both the selection of psycholinguistic variables and the interpretation of findings with the discourse of the TRPG community.

One major takeaway from the results is that, from a psycholinguistic perspective, individuals who blog about TRPG are not that different from those who use Reddit to debate aspects of their favorite shows or trade tips about cookie recipes. The one significant difference lies in the lower usage
of the 1st-person singular in favor of plural language. This resonates with research highlighting that TRPG play is, first and foremost, a communal effort. Counselors working with TRPG players must attend to the vital role that TRPGs play in providing social support to players (Coe, 2017). Counselors looking to increase their cultural competence with this unique group can tap into the opportunity to help clients slay both imaginary and metaphorical dragons within the process of TRPG play.
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Table 2.1

Descriptive Statistics for Broad Psycholinguistic Variables (RQ1)

| Variable    | Study | Reference | |Difference|
|-------------|-------|-----------|----------------|
| Analytic    | 62.60 | 35.21     | 27.39           |
| Clout       | 36.53 | 31.40     | 5.13            |
| Authentic   | 44.54 | 61.74     | 17.20           |
| Tone        | 42.47 | 33.53     | 8.94            |
### Table 2.2

*Descriptive Statistics for Linguistic and Psychological Variables (RQs 2–3)*

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<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Reference Corpus</th>
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<td>Percentage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of All Words</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1st-person plural</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>3rd-person plural</td>
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<td>3484</td>
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<tr>
<td>achieve</td>
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<td>5160</td>
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### Table 2.3

**Inferential Analyses for Linguistic and Psychological Variables (RQs 4–5)**

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<th>Cat.</th>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Study</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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*Note. Df = 1, critical value for $\chi^2$ p < .001, = 10.83.*
Chapter 3: Manuscript 2
Critical Words: Looking for Keywords and Patterns in Role-playing Game Online Discussion Forums

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Given the public and published status of the data, no review by the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board was required. This research was part of the first author’s dissertation research project. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to R. Paul James, Counseling Academic Unit, Oregon State University, 104 Furman Hall, Corvallis, OR 97331–3502. E-mail: jamesro@oregonstate.edu
Abstract

Tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) have been the topic of conversation and controversy since the inception of Dungeons & Dragons™ in the 1970s. Misunderstandings about this unique group resulted in a long-term association of psychological dysfunction with this form of recreation that is still reflected in the views of mental health providers. The present study aimed to dispel some of these myths by using a corpus linguistics design to identify the unique keywords, multiterm words, and the word networks of the keywords that differentiate TRPG blogging from blogging in general. The keyness analysis identified the words “dnd” and “homebrew” as the two keywords and “bonus action” and “spell slot” as the multiword terms differentiating TRPG blogging from blogging in general. The word networks of dnd and homebrew demonstrate the unique linguistic patterns of this group as well as the focus on the communal nature of the TRPG experience. These results highlight the creative nature of TRPG play as well as the fact that this type of gaming focuses as much on the group experience as on any specific player. Counselors can use these findings to increase their cultural competence when working with TRPG players, as well as potentially harness their creative energy in the counseling process.

Keywords: keyness, collocation, corpus linguistics, tabletop role-playing games, Dungeons & Dragons
Imagine living in a world where your only limitations are your creativity and willingness to collaborate with others. Danger abounds, but you and your trusty companions can meet any challenge if you work together. If this sounds fantastical, you are absolutely right, and simultaneously wrong, in that this experience is real for many people. This scene describes what one might experience in a game of Dungeons & Dragons™ (D&D), a table-top role-playing game (TRPG) that allows players to create characters and enact a story on a mythological level (Crawford, 2014). Research suggests that TRPG players use games such as D&D to explore their identity and connect socially within a safe space that helps them feel a sense of belonging (Coe, 2017). However, TRPGs have a long history of stigmatization and false association with psychological dysfunction (Ascherman, 1993; Caywood, 1991; Lancaster, 1994; Leeds, 1995; Martin & Fine, 1991; Simón, 1987), the remnants of which linger, even among mental health professionals (Ben-Ezra et al., 2018; Lis et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, almost no research exists using corpus linguistic techniques to analyze the discourse of the TRPG community. The closest related studies on player discourse in online games indicate that gaming communities develop their own language patterns (Olejniczak, 2015; Ooi, 2008; Stephan & Bulow, 2017), which players use differently depending on factors such as gender—that of the player as well as the character being role-played (Heritage, 2020). The research questions detailed later in this paper address this gap by seeking to understand the discourse of the TRPG community, and publication of these findings could disseminate this information to counselors.

The second goal of this study was to disrupt current practices in the mental health community by raising awareness surrounding the TRPG community. Recent researchers have argued for the therapeutic utility of TRPGs such as D&D in psychotherapy (Henrich & Worthington, 2021). For example, Cheng (2013) found that playing TRPGs can help individuals develop higher levels of creativity, while
Rivers et al. (2015) found that playing TRPGs can help players harness empathy towards others. However, concurrent research indicates that mental health providers display reticence towards or even bias against role-playing games, which lessens as their familiarity with TRPGs increases (Ben-Ezra et al., 2018). Multicultural and social justice competence—an ethical obligation for all counselors—requires practitioners to gain awareness of their own values so that they can attune themselves to the worldviews of clients (Ratts et al., 2016). Linguistic analysis offers a window into the worldview of TRPG players that could allow counselors to connect more effectively with members of this subculture.

In a review of the literature on the D&D TRPG community, five key themes were identified: (a) key definitions, (b) what research exists about the D&D TRPG, (c) what research exists surrounding the D&D TRPG blogging community, (d) what research exists about the concept of collocation in communities related to gaming, and (e) what research exists about the concept of keyness in communities related to gaming. These concepts are discussed prior to outlining the research questions that guided the present study.

Three key terms unique to this field of study require further definition. The first is role-play game (RPG), which includes any activity in which players take on the role of a character that they then control throughout gameplay (Montola, 2009). One important feature of RPGs is that, while there are general rules governing the mechanics of the game, each player controls the choices of their characters in a way that each gameplay is as unique as the individuals doing the role play. A second key term is tabletop role playing game (TRPG), a subgenre of RPGs in which players gather around a table and use figurines to represent their characters. The third key term is Dungeons & Dragons™ (Crawford, 2014), which is the TRPG serving as the focal point of this research. One of the earliest iterations of RPGs, D&D provides a structure for role play via a set of rules that governs player interactions. These key definitions provide a foundation for understanding the present research.

Analysis of demographic data from the RPG community provides additional insight into the
characteristics of this group. Data from research on massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), a large-scale digital descendant of TRPGs, indicates players range in age from 18 to 58, with approximately 80% of players identifying as male and 20% as female (Kirby et al., 2014). Demographic data on TRPG players points to increased diversity compared to MMRPGs, with player ages ranging from 10 to 64, 38.4% of players identifying as female, 53.6% of players identifying as male, and 7.2% of players identifying as other or nonbinary (D&D Research, 2020). These data substantiate those provided by Wizards of the Coast, the parent company of the D&D franchise, which reports over 50 million players to date and claims that more people than ever before are playing TRPGs (Wieland, 2021). This level of engagement makes it highly likely that counselors will interact with TRPG players if they have not done so already.

Academic inquiry regarding RPGs reaches across multiple disciplines and frameworks. Tabletop games represent a small portion of the role-playing genre, which includes computer-based role-playing games, live-action role-playing games, and multiplayer online role-playing games (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). Researchers from diverse fields such as communication (Adams, 2013), philosophy (Robichaud & Irwin, 2014), and mathematics (Lai & Musiker, 2020) have all shown interest in the insights of the study of RPGs and their players. Individual RPGs also gather subcultures of fans, called “fandoms,” that are also the focus of separate lines of research (McMullin & Hibbard, 2021). The focus of this present study was narrowed down to research on D&D and its fellow TRPGs.

The research surrounding the specific RPG subgenre of D&D reflects the diversity of the communities that enjoy the game. Some investigation focuses on understanding the purpose of TRPG play and the psychological impact of gameplay on players (Adams, 2013; Bowman & Lieberoth, 2018; Coe, 2017). D&D also draws the attention of scholars, who reflect on the implications of TRPG on sexuality (Mussett, 2014), moral decision making (Miles & Hess, 2014), free will (Littman, 2014), and political theology (Hollander, 2021). Scholars in education and mental health fields have also explored
the applicability of D&D play to foster social development in both children (Zayas & Bradford, 1986) and adults (Daniau, 2016), as well as second-language learning (Reinhardt, 2018). Despite the breadth of inquiry represented, these studies provide little insight into the ways in which D&D players interact online.

A dearth of research exists examining D&D players and blogging. The literature acknowledges that fandom of a particular game or television show often elicits online discussion (McMullin & Hibbard, 2021), yet no formal analysis of the online interactions of D&D participants has been conducted. The most similar line of inquiry revolves around massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), a subgenre of RPG play (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). Recent research has grouped MMORPGs within the broader framework of multiplatform social media and has attempted to analyze personality characteristics unique to MMORPG users (Vaid & Harari, 2021). Similar to other RPGs, online play of MMORPGs instills a sense of connectedness to a larger community, which is often associated with increased reported self-esteem in players (Sierra et al., 2016). These similarities to the broader research surrounding D&D suggest that inquiry into the nature of D&D blogging discourse could yield similar insights.

Collocation research provides one avenue to explore the discourse of the D&D blogging community. Collocation is a research methodology focused on identifying patterns of word usage, usually focused on one specific word (Brezina et al., 2015). Research on video game data using collocation indicates patterns in language use connecting male characters to physical violence (Heritage, 2020). Another study using similar techniques to analyze interlingual conversations about gaming suggests that players develop words and word patterns unique to their community (Olejniczak, 2015). Collocation analysis of D&D blogging discourse could provide similar insights about this unique community.

Keyness research is another corpus linguistics tool that could offer insight into the D&D blogging
community. This methodology involves analyzing the keywords used within a body of discourse, which offers insight into what individuals who contribute to that discourse find interesting or important (Bondi, 2008). The scholarly discourse in the field of linguistics supports the existence of lexicons unique to online groups. For example, Ooi (2008) found that online gaming websites use language that differs significantly from popular online dictionaries. Furthermore, keyness analysis of chat functions in MMORPGs indicates unique vocabulary and word usage patterns within that community (Stephan & Bulow, 2017). Keyness research on the D&D blogging community could yield similar insights about the culture of this group.

Given the literature, three questions were developed to guide this study:

RQ1: In comparison to blogging in general, what words occur more frequently in RPG community blogging?

RQ2: In comparison to blogging in general, what multiword terms occur more frequently in RPG community blogging?

RQ3: What is the word network of the word that most distinguished the RPG community’s blogging from blogging in general?

RQ4: What is the word network of the word that was second in distinguishing the RPG community’s blogging from blogging in general?

Preregistration of these research questions can be found at https://osf.io/vdg9b.

Method

Design

The current study employed a corpus linguistics design (Weisser, 2016). There were four variables: subcorpus, keyness, node, and collocation. The corpus consisted of posts made by individuals discussing TRPGs on the blogging website Reddit. The corpus was divided into subcorpuses based on the subreddit from which the data originated. The level of measure differed for each variable: (a) corpus
was nominal, (b) keyness was continuous, (c) node was nominal, and (d) collocation was continuous. The unit of analysis was words. Human subjects review was not required for this study as the data came from public websites, and no identifiers (e.g., geolocation) were collected.

Study Corpus

Register, Scope, and Sources

The register for this corpus was blogging; the subregister was blogging about D&D TRPGs. The scope included the last 1,000 public posts made as of May 30, 2023. The source material was derived from discussion forums on the website, Reddit. These forums, called subreddits, were created to host discourse surrounding the play of games such as D&D. Two specific subreddits were used: r/dndnext and r/DnD5e. We used Reddit’s application programming interface (API) system to gather public posts within the allotted time frame to build the corpus. The subreddits were scraped for posts in which users discussed experiences of role-playing characters while playing D&D. Identifying information such as user id and geolocation were not scraped. For the whole corpus, the token (word count) and type counts (unique words) were 390,167 and 20,262, respectively.

Preprocessing

The corpus was scraped from an interactive forum and was programmed to examine text related to the user’s discussion of their role-playing experience. The API scraped the last 1,000 posts that used monolingual English and consisted of 90% valid English words according to the English Wiktionary. The API software then saved the posts in a .csv file for analysis. The software eliminated the following while collecting the text: usernames, location of the posts, posts from outside the United States, photographs, foreign language words, and hyperlinks. Any nonstandard orthography, including typing errors and spelling errors, was also removed. The text was then deposited in .txt files and processed to remove punctuation, numbers, and white space. A document-term matrix was then generated for application with keyness. Word stemming was not applied, and stopwords, or words
unrelated to the topic (Sarica & Luo, 2021), were not removed. The stopwords were later filtered out for collocation analysis.

Reference Corpus

Register, Scope, and Sources

The English Web 2021 corpus (enTenTen21; Sketch Engine, 2023b) contains the reference corpus used for this study. This corpus consists of a compilation of written web content from four genres: blog, discussion, legal, and news. The enTenTen21 corpus contains 36 billion words from samples with diverse topics including arts, business, games, health, home, recreation, reference, science, sports, and technology. This corpus represents a broad range of discourse from internet sources that provides a contrast to the specific content of TRPG bloggers.

Preprocessing

This corpus is available for use on the website SketchEngine.eu. Consequently, the corpus required no preprocessing.

Measures

Word Node

The node is the central word linked to the collocates.

Keyness

Single-Word Keyness

This term refers to specific words used with high frequency in a body of text (Gabrielatos, 2018). Analysis of these keywords can reveal the theme(s) within the discourse of a group. This analysis can include how often the word appears as well as dispersion, or the distribution of word usage across a corpus (Egbert & Biber, 2019).

Multiword Keyness
This term refers to multiword terms and phrases used in high frequency within a corpus. Keyness analysis allows for the comparison of term usage between study and reference corpuses based upon the frequency and dispersion of each term.

**Collocation**

Collocation is the process of identifying the words most used in proximity to a particular word (Baker et al., 2006). It can be used to help researchers understand the role of certain words in the discourse of a group. For example, collocates of a word can reveal biases in the ways a word is used. The collocation parameters were as follows: statistic name = logDice, statistic value threshold = 0, and filter = none.

**Apparatus**

All analyses were conducted using software provided by the website SketchEngine.eu (Sketch Engine, 2023c).

**Data Analysis**

RQs 1–2 involved both descriptive and inferential analyses. In terms of descriptive statistics, the top 10 keywords from each corpus are reported along with their frequency (raw and normalized) and dispersion across the study corpus (raw and normalized). The inferential analyses involved a comparison of the proportions of each word between a study corpus and a reference corpus. Simple maths was the appropriate statistical analysis for this task (Sketch Engine, 2023c). The simple maths formula allows for the comparison of word usage frequencies between the two corpuses, even if the two sources are not equal in size. Analysis also included calculation of the average logarithmic distance frequency (ALDF; Sketch Engine, 2023a), which estimates the spread of a word usage across the entirety of the corpus to prevent results from being influenced by unequal word distribution. The settings for keyness were: (a) attribute examined = word, (b) focus on (i.e., smoothing number) = 1, and (c) minimum attribute frequency = 1. The number 1 (n.b., the Sketch Engine default setting) was selected as the smoothing
number because of the desire given the nature of the topic to focus on lower-frequency words (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). For the RQs 3–4, logDice was used as the measure of association and the part of speech option was set to auto.

Results

RQ1 focused on single-word keyness analysis between the study and reference corpuses. The two strongest words were “dnd” (D&D) and “homebrew.” In the TRPG community, “homebrew” is the term used to describe a unique story developed independently by players rather than by a gaming company. A list of the top 20 keywords in TRPG blogging forums can be viewed in Table 3.1. RQ2 branched out to multiword terms that occurred more frequently in the study corpus compared to the reference corpus. The two strongest phrases were “bonus action” and “spell slot.” While the term “bonus action” is self-explanatory, “spell slot” refers to a game mechanic governing the use of magic by characters in TPRG play. The top 20 key multiword terms can be viewed in Table 3.2. RQs 3–4 examined the words associated with the top two keywords in the keyness analysis. Figure 3.1 provides a visualization of the word network of collocates for the keyword “dnd.” Figure 3.2 illustrates the word network of collocates for the second keyword, “homebrew.” Complete results are available on this research project’s Open Science Foundation website (https://osf.io/fnwmj/).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the discourse of individuals who blog about TRPGs to give counselors broader insight into the worldviews of TRPG players. RQ1 examined single-word keyness, RQ2 focused on multiword keyness, and RQs 3–4 analyzed the collocates of the top two keywords in the study corpus. The results suggest that the language used by TRPG bloggers revolves around navigating the intricate rules and interpersonal dynamics surrounding TRPG play.

In terms of RQ1 (TRPG word usage), two themes emerged from the results. The first was navigating the game from the perspective of the dungeon master (dm), the term used to refer to the
individual in charge of running the game mechanics for a table of TRPG players. The second theme related to players’ experiences. These themes will be addressed sequentially.

Concerning theme 1 (i.e., dungeon master perspective), there are two probable reasons for the obtained results. One probable reason is that TRPG players use blogging platforms to help them navigate the unique challenges of playing D&D and related RPGs. While direct quotes cannot be used according to the limitations of the study, concordance references highlight that TRPG play requires more than just fighting dragons. For example, one blogger using the term “dm” requested insight from fellow players about ways to keep his table of players engaged and excited as they navigate meeting together on a regular basis. Similarly, another section referring to “homebrew” in the corpus identifies a struggle by one game master to determine what rules are reasonable for a campaign they created for their players. An alternative explanation for the obtained results is that blogs in general are often used to solicit input from others about concerns ranging from dinner recipes to relationship advice. For example, Muscanell and Guadagno (2012) linked online social networking usage to the forming and maintenance of relationships. Between the later and the former, navigating the challenges of TRPG play provides a better explanation for the results due to the specific links between the keywords and D&D. TRPG bloggers show a pattern of discussing the challenges associated with balancing the complex rules of the game with the interpersonal concerns of the people enjoying gameplay. These data suggest that the creative and collaborative story-telling process makes playing D&D much more complex than the average board game.

Concerning theme 2 (i.e., players’ experience), there are two probable reasons for the obtained results. One possible explanation for these references is that TRPG players want to gain social clout by sharing their unique character designs and features with the broader community. For example, one blogger posted a lengthy argument for the best ways to implement the “multiclass” feature within the
game. In other places in the concordance lines, bloggers spend time justifying their choices of features for their character. A paraphrased 9 left/5 right example from the concordance illustrates this point:

Let me tell you it’s been amazing! With my multiclass abilities and my extra items ...

This suggests that to some degree TRPG bloggers use the platform to show off their creative choices. Another possible explanation is that, similar to dungeon masters, the breadth and depth of interpretive possibility presented by the D&D rules prompts players to seek consultation and support about both character design and role-playing procedure. For example, many of the key terms such as “warlock” and “druid” refer to types of characters players build and role play. These discussions often show bloggers asking for clarification of rules around character construction or mechanics of certain traits or features. A sample paraphrase of a 9 left/9 right concordance line with “warlock” as the node word that illustrates this point is:

I’d planned to play as a pact of blade warlock but I’m not clear on how it would work.

References to the term “multiclass” makes a similar point, as bloggers request feedback about their understanding of the mechanics surrounding character construction. A paraphrase of a 5 left/5 right concordance line with the node word multiclass provides another example of this theme:

Would I be able to multiclass from martial to arcane classes?

Of the two explanations, the concordance line examination supports the second explanation indicating that the wide range of creative possibilities presented in the role-play process prompts TRPG players to seek community feedback.

Regarding RQ2 (TRPG term usage), the top two multiword terms resonate with the emerging theme of utilizing blogging forums to seek feedback on aspects of TRPG play that are left up to interpretation during gameplay. There are two likely explanations for the results. The first is that terms such as “bonus action” have so many different interpretations that consultation with peers via blogging forums serves as a meaningful way to seek support regarding those interpretations. A brief consultation
with the D&D Player’s Handbook (Crawford, 2014) provides some support for this explanation, revealing a different iteration of “bonus action” for each type of character available to players. An alternative explanation for the results lies once again in the intersection between the written rules and the highly subjective and social nature of TRPG play. With so many different interpretations of terms such as “spell slot,” both dungeon masters and role players are often required to negotiate the way that a group wants to collectively navigate the rules and experiences of gameplay. This second explanation resonates with research suggesting that the transformative potential of TRPG play comes from the social skills required by the gameplay process (Daniau, 2016). As such, the more likely explanation of the key term usage is that TRPG bloggers rely on feedback from these platforms to make their way through difficult terrain, both within the game and without.

RQ3 shifts focus to the collocates of “dnd,” the primary keyword differentiating TRPG blogging from blogging in general. The common collocates of “dnd” represent the technical and social aspects of TRPG play. The simplest explanation for these results is that these collocates represent common phrases required to enter any discussion of D&D. This explanation fits for the top two words (play and campaign), as the term “play” is even a part of the term TRPG. In other words, one simply cannot discuss TRPGs without using these collocates. However, further exploration of the collocation map offers the alternative explanation that any discussion of the term “dnd” must include discussion of the social aspect of gameplay. The next common collocates (group and community) emphasize that TRPGs are collaborative and driven by social exchanges. This explanation fits with research indicating that RPGs in general support their own social frameworks and rules for navigating interpersonal processes (Montola, 2008). Thus, the second explanation provides a better fit as it reverberates not only with previous research but also with the discourse of the TRPG blogging community.

The fourth and final research question focused on the word network of the second most keyword of TRPG blogging, “homebrew.” The collocates of this term, unique to the TRPG lexicon,
emphasize the technical complexity of TRPG play. As mentioned above, the data supports that the
creative process within TRPG play requires some negotiation. The official D&D *Dungeon Master’s Guide*
clearly articulates the open-ended nature of gameplay in its introduction, stating “the DM acts as a
mediator between the rules and the players” (Crawford et al., 2014, p. 5). Thus, one explanation for the
results is that departing from the prescribed storylines to create a “homebrew” (i.e., unique DM-
authored storyline) both creates opportunities for creativity and simultaneously necessitates
consultation to ensure that the gameplay process remains satisfactory for all involved. An alternative
explanation is that TRPG bloggers use these platforms to seek emotional validation for their ideas.
Research supports the notion that individuals seeking power or notoriety often use blogs and other
forms of social media to gain influence (Martin, 2008). However, references from the concordance
regularly connect references to “homebrew” to questions about functionality of mechanics and fairness
to both players and the dungeon master. This suggests that the first explanation is more attuned to the
nature of the TRPG blogging community discourse, indicating that the creative risk of building a unique
world requires support from fellow adventurers.

The results shed light on the complex interpersonal and technical aspects of TRPG play while
simultaneously highlighting three limitations of this study that require further consideration. First, the
use of Reddit as a data source presented an unanticipated limitation in that the platform changed its
policies on the mining of data that drastically limited the size of the study corpus. The original design
called for the mining of one year’s worth of data to construct the study corpus; however, Reddit’s
limitation to the last 1,000 posts allowed for approximately only one month of data to be gathered.
There is a possibility that outside and temporally linked circumstances occurred during the period that
bloggers posted on Reddit that may have influenced the content. Additionally, the focus on posts made
in monolingual English may exclude the perspectives of individuals who enjoy TRPGs in other languages.
Second, the focus of inquiry on the TRPG blogging community limits the generalizability of the results to
only those individuals who blog about games such as D&D. The results may not represent the discourse of the TRPG community that does not use online platforms to discuss gameplay. Finally, the descriptive nature of the results requires some level of interpretation on the part of the researchers. Bias on the part of the researchers could potentially mean that those interpretations do not accurately reflect the TRPG community.

Based on these limitations, two recommendations for future research emerge. The first is to broaden the scope of the research by gathering data over a longer period or from different blogging platforms besides Reddit. A larger sample of data would strengthen the results by providing a point of comparison to determine whether the data sample in the present study accurately reflects TRPG blogging discourse as a whole. Future studies could also analyze the discourse of TRPG bloggers using languages other than English, which could enrich the diversity of the data. Another recommendation would be to take a mixed methods approach and adapt some of the techniques used in qualitative research, such as member checks or focus group interviews, to verify that the research findings resonate with the lived experiences of individuals from the TRPG community. Such a change would help researchers determine the degree to which the discourse of TRPG bloggers reflects the broader TRPG community.

The clear implication of these results is that TRPG bloggers use a highly specific and complex lexicon that distinguishes them from the blogging community as a whole. These individuals spend their time on platforms such as Reddit negotiating the interplay between the technical and interpersonal aspects of TRPG play. Counselors practicing through the lens of multicultural competence and social justice advocacy charge themselves with the responsibility to gain deeper insight into the unique lived experiences of the individuals with whom they work (Ratts et al., 2016). The key takeaway is that counselors working with TRPG players must consider the unique values reflected in the language of that community in order to provide culturally competent care. A counselor needs to be able to understand
the basic terms of TRPG play to help a client navigate how to explore their identity by role playing a barbarian while also attempting to build healthy relationships with the wizard, druid, and paladin in their party. In a way, counselors and TRPG players seem to share a desire to collaborate with others to create community and a sense of belonging for all who come to the table.
References


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### Table 3.1

**Top 20 Words With Strong Keyness (RQ1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Raw Frequency</th>
<th>Normalized Frequency</th>
<th>ALDF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dnd</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>25767</td>
<td>809.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homebrew</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>58576</td>
<td>761.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dm</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>276757</td>
<td>1955.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artificer</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>14128</td>
<td>430.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warlock</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>64298</td>
<td>656.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cantrip</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>6892</td>
<td>315.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paladin</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>92993</td>
<td>640.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subclass</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>115321</td>
<td>592.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phandelver</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>199.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caster</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>150176</td>
<td>651.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multiclass</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>6064</td>
<td>205.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>druid</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>120563</td>
<td>545.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eldritch</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>18699</td>
<td>222.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strahd</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2277</td>
<td>171.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleric</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>194212</td>
<td>668.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>lvl</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>56729</td>
<td>302.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sorcerer</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>126490</td>
<td>463.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one-shot</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>54287</td>
<td>279.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hexblade</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>148.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dex</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>73958</td>
<td>322.94</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2

*Top 20 Multiword Terms With Strong Keyness (RQ2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Study Frequency</th>
<th>Reference Frequency</th>
<th>Raw Frequency</th>
<th>Normalized Frequency</th>
<th>ALDF Study Reference</th>
<th>ALDF Reference</th>
<th>Simple Maths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bonus action</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>363.95</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>60.48</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>361.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spell slot</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>356.26</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>56.63</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>342.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long rest</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>287.06</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>51.40</td>
<td>42.54</td>
<td>269.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>magic item</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>374.20</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>62.49</td>
<td>20.46</td>
<td>249.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proficiency bonus</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>174.28</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>24.16</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>174.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>level spell</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>199.91</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>33.87</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>168.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stat block</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>153.78</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>37.12</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>152.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attack roll</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>164.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>34.30</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>151.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hit point</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>210.17</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>27.45</td>
<td>38.34</td>
<td>143.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spell list</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>161.47</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>26.86</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>140.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saving throw</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>151.22</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>31.64</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>122.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class feature</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>107.65</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>22.34</td>
<td>10.67</td>
<td>98.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attack action</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>97.39</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>18.65</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>97.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amazing advice</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>92.27</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>9.73</td>
<td>10.89</td>
<td>91.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extra attack</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>92.27</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>15.54</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>90.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fighting style</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>115.34</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>25.76</td>
<td>72.21</td>
<td>88.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>silvery barb</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>84.58</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>13.54</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>85.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wild shape</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>82.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>82.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>short rest</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>97.39</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>16.01</td>
<td>66.57</td>
<td>81.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weapon attack</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>82.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>14.55</td>
<td>16.89</td>
<td>80.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>bonus action</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>363.95</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>60.48</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>361.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1

Word Network of the Word “dnd” (Dungeons & Dragons)
Figure 3.2

Word Network of the Word “homebrew”
Chapter 4: A General Conclusion
The sections covered in this chapter are (a) a summary of findings, limitations, and discussion for MS1; (b) a summary of findings, limitations, and discussion for MS2; (c) linkages between the manuscripts; (d) implications of the manuscripts; and (e) recommendations for future research.

**Summary of Manuscript 1**

MS1 explored the psycholinguistic characteristics of the discourse of TRPG bloggers compared to blogging in general. Five questions guided the study:

RQ1: What was the level of use of broad psycholinguistic processes in the tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) community?

RQ2: What was the level of use of linguistic processes in the TRPG blogging community?

RQ3: What was the level of use of psychological processes in the TRPG blogging community?

RQ4: What linguistic processes distinguish the discourse in the TRPG blogging community from blogging in general?

RQ5: What psychological processes distinguish the discourse in the TRPG blogging community from blogging in general?

The RQ1 results outline the difference in psycholinguistic variables between the TRPG blogging corpus and the general blogging corpus are available in Table 2.1. The descriptive statistics for RQs 2–3 can be found in Table 2.2, and the inferential statistics comparing the two corpuses are in Table 2.3. For RQ1, the absolute differences in psycholinguistic variables were as follows: analytic = \(|27.39|\), clout = \(|5.13|\), authentic = \(|17.20|\), and emotional tone = \(|8.94|\). Regarding RQs 2–5, only one linguistic variable showed a significant difference between the two corpuses after applying Bayesian statistical analyses. The strongest difference was in the first-person singular pronouns \(G^2 = 17.52, p < .001, \text{BIC} = 4.79\). The inferential statistics indicated that there was insufficient evidence to support a significant difference in the other variables between the two corpuses.
Limitations

There are two noteworthy limitations to this study. The first is that the generalizability of this study may be limited by its focus on individuals who blog about TRPGs. Individuals who blog about their TRPG experience may embody characteristics that do not apply to all those who enjoy TRPG play due to the unique demands of communicating on an online platform. A second limitation lies in the selection of the variables, which were chosen based on that broader view of TRPG players and not on their intersection with the characteristics of bloggers. Using member checks or a focus group of TRPG players to guide the selection and interpretation of variables may impact the course of inquiry.

Implications and Recommendations

Two major implications for clinical practice emerged from these results. The first is that counselors working with TRPG players should attend to the communal and analytic orientation of TRPG bloggers. Psycholinguistic analysis revealed that TRPG bloggers are more likely to be concerned with facts and less likely to use “I” statements than bloggers in general. Clinicians could potentially harness these strengths in the therapeutic process by understanding that TRPG players share this disposition towards the interpersonal rather than the intrapersonal. The second implication lies in the potential therapeutic utility of TRPGs. Counselors working with TRPG players could view the process of personal development and wellness through the lens of character building. The process of TRPG play itself presents an opportunity for clients to engage in problem-solving and building communication skills (Henrich & Worthington, 2021). Tremendous creative opportunities exist in the intersection of TRPGs and the counseling process.

Turning to future research, the first way to expand upon this research might be to expand the line of inquiry to discourse surrounding other TRPGs. D&D (Crawford, 2014) may be the seminal work, but its influence spurred the development of a myriad of games using similar rules and systems of play (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). Future inquiry could analyze blogging discourse focused on other TRPGs to
explore what similarities and differences exist between the samples. Another opportunity to further develop this research would be to conduct a mixed methods study to include some form of direct input from members of the TRPG community. This might increase the generalizability of the results by limiting the impact of researcher bias on the interpretation of findings.

Overall, this research provides counselors with the opportunity to increase their knowledge of the TRPG community as well as add creative techniques for connecting with clients to help them build meaningful interpersonal skills. These findings also increase awareness about the unique characteristics of this group, which includes a growing number of individuals from diverse intersections (Wieland, 2021). As all counselors share a common responsibility to increase cultural competence (Ratts et al., 2016), this research offers insight into not only the individual players but also the transformative role of TRPGs.

**Summary of Manuscript 2**

MS2 focused on identifying the keywords, multiterm words, and the word networks of the keywords that distinguished the TRPG blogging community from blogging in general. Four questions guided the study:

RQ1: In comparison to blogging in general, what words occur more frequently in TRPG community blogging?

RQ2: In comparison to blogging in general, what multiword terms occur more frequently in TRPG community blogging?

RQ3: What is the word network of the word that most distinguished the TRPG community’s blogging from blogging in general?

RQ4: What is the word network of the word that was second in distinguishing the TRPG community’s blogging from blogging in general?
For RQ1, the keyness analysis identified “dnd” and “homebrew” as the top two keywords differentiating TRPG blogging from blogging in general. The top 20 keywords list is available in Table 3.1. Regarding RQ2, the multiword terms “bonus action” and “spell slot” most significantly distinguished TRPG blogging from the reference corpus. The top 20 multiword terms can be viewed in Table 3.2. Regarding RQs 3–4, the word networks of “dnd” and “homebrew” are shown in Figures 3.1 and 3.2. The most common collocate of “dnd” was “play,” while “campaign” was the most common collocate of “homebrew.”

Limitations

Three limitations emerged upon review of this study. The first is that the sampling method of scraping the last 1,000 posts on a subreddit presents the possibility that a temporally linked phenomenon could have influenced the discourse of the TRPG bloggers, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. These bloggers also primarily discussed their experience playing D&D, which represents only one game within a broad genre. Analysis of blogging discourse about other TRPGs could reveal different word usage patterns. Finally, the interpretation of these results relied upon the knowledge of the researchers, and thus their biases about the subject matter. Including qualitative research tools such as member checks in the data analysis process might limit the influence of that bias on the interpretation of the results.

Implications and Recommendations

Two clear implications for clinical practice emanate from these results. The first is that TRPG players have distinct word usage patterns that are technically complex and unique to the game playing context. Counselors who want to build competence in working with TRPG players must attend to the unique lexicon of this group. The results also suggest that TRPG players orient themselves towards conversations around the group experience as well as their community. While research points to the potential applications of these games for interpersonal learning (Daniau, 2016), counselors who want to
harness the power of TRPGs in their sessions must obtain some level of fluency with their vocabulary. Doing so could provide clinicians with the opportunity to integrate TRPG play into group or family treatment processes, thereby tapping into the ways that TRPG play can help individuals learn how to navigate conflict and build their social skills (Henrich & Worthington, 2021).

While myriad possibilities exist for future research, two opportunities stand out that might build on the knowledge gleaned from these results. First, the keywords identified seem to have clear connections to D&D; however, many other types of TRPGs exist. Future research could examine the blogging discourse surrounding one or several other TRPGs to evaluate what language permeates the genre and what language is unique to D&D players. Another opportunity to expand on this research is to take a mixed methods approach and use member checks or focus groups to guide or even expand upon the interpretation of the results. This could enrich the discourse around the meaning of these keywords, phrases, and collocations while simultaneously limiting the impact of researcher bias. This could increase the overall generalizability of the results to the broader TRPG community.

Linkages Between the Two Studies

The first thematic link between these two studies lies in their shared interest in understanding the unique characteristics of the blogging discourse of TRPG players. Both studies used a corpus constructed from scraped blog posts on the same two subreddits discussing TRPG play. Each study also relied on a form of corpus linguistic analysis to investigate the word usage patterns of TRPG bloggers. MS1 used computer-assisted text analysis via the LIWC-22 software (Boyd et al., 2022) to understand the psycholinguistic characteristics of this group, while MS2 relied on keyness analysis via Sketch Engine (2023) to determine the most used words, multiterm phrases, and their collocates in the same corpus.

Beyond the methodological linkages, these studies shared a common interest in understanding the linguistic characteristics distinguishing TRPG blogging from blogging in general. In MS1, the LIWC-22 analysis provided insight into the ways TRPG bloggers use broad psycholinguistic variables (authenticity,
clout, analytic, and tone), linguistic variables (1st-person singular, 1st-person plural, 3rd-person singular, and 3rd-person plural), and psychological variables (affiliation, achieve, power, positive emotion, negative emotion, friend, leisure, reward, and risk). MS2 provided a different perspective by examining the keywords (dnd and homebrew), multiword terms (bonus action and magic item), as well as the collocates of the top two keywords to discern the unique word usage patterns of TRPG bloggers. The methodological differences between the studies gave broader insight, while the combination of these approaches provided a greater contribution to the knowledge regarding this unique group.

**Contribution to the Literature**

The primary contribution of the results of these two studies is to the knowledge base regarding TRPG blogging. The manuscripts share a unique corpus built from the contributions of TRPG bloggers to two blogging forums dedicated to discussion of TRPG play on the website Reddit. Prior to these studies, no research existed examining the psycholinguistic characteristics and unique word usage patterns of TRPG bloggers. Thus, the results contribute to the overall knowledge base with contributions such as the data indicating that TRPG bloggers use significantly fewer 1st-person pronouns than bloggers in general.

These results also contribute to the literature in that they run against the lay and professional prejudice about these players being misanthropic individuals. The empirical results highlight the communal emphasis of TRPG play and confirm that this focus extends to players’ written discourse as they discuss gameplay in online forums. These findings increase awareness of the vocabulary and psycholinguistic features of TRPG players, offering counselors a pathway to increase their competence when working with individuals identifying within this community. This contribution of knowledge serves the ethical mandate of all counselors to increase their knowledge of the worldviews of their clients (Ratts et al., 2016; CACREP, 2023).
Future Research Agenda

The unique intersections of counseling, TRPGs, online blogging, and corpus linguistics in this research present multiple avenues for future research. The study of online discourse applied to counseling is not unique to these studies, yet many opportunities to analyze the unique psycholinguistic features of groups such as TRPG players remain unexplored. Future research could focus on using similar methodology to understand the unique other fandom cultures such as movies, television shows, or other types of games. A natural extension of this research could be to use the same methodology to analyze the online blogging discourse surrounding a different TRPG. This might provide insight into what aspects of TRPG blogging discourse transcend the type of game versus those aspects that are unique to D&D players. Further exploration could also expand counselors’ understanding of gaming culture and the subculture of TRPGs.

Another possible avenue for future research lies in the intersection of corpus linguistics and qualitative research. Corpus linguistics seems to draw from aspects of quantitative research in that it relies on statistical analysis; however, the methodologies used in this research use an angle that is more descriptive than experimental. Combining a corpus linguistics approach with some qualitative methodologies such as focus groups could greatly enrich the interpretation of the empirical results by grounding them in the lived experiences of community stakeholders. Additionally, the results of this research could be used to formulate questions that could guide a more in-depth phenomenological exploration of the lived experiences of TRPG players.

Reflecting on these possibilities, I am filled with a sense of excitement for my future career as a counselor, educator, and scholar. I look forward to continuing to utilize corpus linguistics and computer-assisted text analysis as a researcher. However, I am most excited about the opportunity to expand my research skills by branching into qualitative methods. The increasing popularity of TRPGs and related games creates a need for continued exploration of the unique cultures that emerge in their wake. For
example, I plan to build on this line of research soon by conducting a phenomenological exploration of
the lived experiences of TRPG players as they navigate the psychosocial processes of gameplay.

As I conclude this dissertation process, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the growth I have
experienced as a writer and emerging scholar. I am struck by the similarities to the counseling process in
that it is important to set concrete and measurable goals that, when met, create a sense of achievement
and an increase in self-efficacy for those involved. Those successes build upon one another in a way that
increases one’s confidence and sense of competence along the way. This deeply resonates with my
experience writing my dissertation, sentence by sentence, over the course of the last 3.5 years. I have
learned that I can accomplish so much more than I imagined possible if I allow myself to approach it one
step at a time. I look forward to sharing this gift with future students as a counselor, educator, scholar,
and supervisor.
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https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2017.00095
Appendices
Appendix A: Human Subjects Review Statement

RE: Meeting Regarding Need for Human Subjects Review

IRB <irb@oregonstate.edu>
Wed 11/30/2022 10:47 AM
To: James, Robert Paul <jamesro@oregonstate.edu>

Hi Paul,

Based on the information provided below, your study does not fall under the purview of the IRB. If the scope of work changes, please contact us.

Best,
Sonnary

From: James, Robert Paul <jamesro@oregonstate.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, November 29, 2022 6:50 PM
To: IRB <irb@oregonstate.edu>
Subject: Re: Meeting Regarding Need for Human Subjects Review

Hello,

This methodology does not require participants to volunteer or provide any data; rather, I will collect the data already published on the web. Specifically, I plan to use data collected off of two Reddit threads. The methodology involves copying all the words used in the discussions except for any identifiers such as usernames or geolocations. Then the words are clumped together in a larger text file (it's more about word count, as I don't even need sentence structures to remain in place). That text file is what I will then run through software that will identify frequency of word use and patterns of word use (for example, what three words are most often used together). In answer to your question, I will have access to usernames initially during the data gathering process, but any usernames or web handles will be deleted during the processing of the data.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need more information. I appreciate your time and support.

Paul

On Thu, Nov 17, 2022 at 1:13 PM IRB <irb@oregonstate.edu> wrote:

HI Paul,

Will you be collecting data for your research or receiving deidentified data? If you will be recruiting/collating the data from participants for your study, then you will more than likely need to submit an IRB application. If you are receiving data that has been deidentified already, then you will not need to submit an IRB application.

Could you provide a summary of your research study?

Best,
Sonnary
Appendix B: Biographical Statement

R. Paul James is a Licensed Professional Counseling in Oklahoma. He received a Bachelor of Sciences degree with a dual major in Psychology and Spanish as well as his Master of Science in Counseling Psychology from Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, OK. Paul is currently pursuing a doctorate in Counseling at Oregon State University, which is a CACREP accredited program. He currently serves as the lead instructor for the Master of Arts in Mental Health, Counseling concentration program at Cameron University in Lawton, OK. Additionally, he maintains a small private practice as a Licensed Professional Counselor and an Oklahoma board-approved LPC Supervisor.