The transformative potential of immersive experiences within role-playing communities

O potencial trasformativo de experiências imersivas em comunidades de role-playing

El potencial transformador de las experiencias inmersivas dentro de las comunidades de role-playing

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Abstract: Analog role-playing games provide an avenue for players to explore a diversity of experiences and self-concepts by playing out new roles in a co-created fictional reality. This article provides a theoretical framework for this process, discussing the nature of consensus reality as a force that can suppress forms of identity expression that individuals find authentic. We discuss how live action role-playing (larp) and tabletop games can provide transformational containers, where individuals can explore new ways of being, relating, and enacting beliefs through the experience of increased agency. As an example, we discuss our larp, Euphoria, which was designed as a role-playing game environment reflecting queer performance spaces within which participants can express gender and sexual identities that feel more authentic.

Keywords: role-playing games; consensus reality; collective consciousness; safety; integration.

Resumo: RPGs analógicos fornecem um caminho para os jogadores explorarem uma diversidade de experiências e autoconceitos, desempenhando novos papéis numa realidade ficcional co-criada. Este artigo fornece referencial teórico para esse processo, discutindo a natureza da realidade consensual como uma força que pode suprimir formas de expressão identitária que os indivíduos consideram autênticas. Discutimos como os larps e os jogos de mesa podem fornecer continentes *transformacionais*, onde os indivíduos podem explorar novas maneiras de ser, relacionar-se e representar crenças por meio da experiência de maior agência. Como exemplo, discutimos nosso larp, *Euphoria*, que foi projetado como um ambiente de role-playing game refletindo espaços de performance queer dentro dos quais os participantes podem expressar identidades sexuais e de gênero que pareçam mais autênticas.

Palavras-chave: jogos de RPG; realidade consensual; consciência coletiva; segurança; integração.

Resumem: Los juegos de rol analógicos brindan a los jugadores una forma de explorar una diversidad de experiencias y autoconceptos, desempeñando nuevos roles en una realidad ficticia creada conjuntamente. Este artículo proporciona un marco teórico para este proceso, discutiendo la naturaleza de la realidad consensuada como una fuerza que puede suprimir formas de expresión de identidad que los individuos consideran auténticas. Discutimos cómo los larps y los juegos de mesa pueden proporcionar continentes transformadores donde las personas pueden explorar nuevas formas de ser, relacionarse y representar creencias a través de la experiencia de una mayor agencia. Como ejemplo, discutimos nuestro larp, Euphoria, que fue diseñado como un entorno de juego de rol que refleja espacios de actuación queer dentro de los cuales los participantes pueden expresar identidades sexuales y de género que se sienten más auténticas.

Palabras clave: juegos de rol; realidad consensuada; consciencia colectiva; seguridad; integración.

1 Introduction

Whether using dice and rulebooks in tabletop or in a live action environment, analog role-playing games provide an avenue for players to explore a diversity of experiences and self-concepts by playing out new roles in a collectively created discursive reality. Some players prefer to consider games like the tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG), *Dungeons & Dragons,* or the live action role-playing (larp) game *College of Wizardry* as simply forms of entertainment. Others players insist that these games have aided in their personal evolution in areas as broad as exploring gender identity, according to Moriarit (2019) and Diakolambrianou, Baird, Westborg e Bowman (2021), understanding social systems, as Bowman (2010), and processing grief, according as Clapper (2016). Many role-players claim that participation in games has helped them transform their lives on a psychological or social level (see Stenros and Sihoven (2019)).

Scholars have discussed the positive impacts of role-playing games as beneficial from a variety of dimensions, including the psychological, social, educational, therapeutic, professional, and political, according to Bowman (2014a); Daniau (2016); Branc *et al.* (2018), and Bowman and Hugaas (2021). Some stated potential benefits of role-playing include emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-awareness, according as Meriläinen (2012) and critical ethical reasoning with Simkins (2010). Also practicing social skills such as teamwork, leadership, and rhetoric, according to Bowman and Standiford (2015); increased self-determined motivation, as Algayres (2018); identity exploration, as Bowman (2010); emotional processing, according as Clapper (2016); increased political awareness (see the *Larp Politics,* Kangas, Loponen, and Särkijärvi eds. (2016)). On a more general level, game researchers such as Doris C. Rusch and Andrew M. Phelps have researched

the ways in which games can explore the human condition, assist with mental illness, help individuals personally self-express, according to Rusch (2017), and allow them to explore meaning through ritual behavior and symbolic interactions with their unconscious, according Rusch and Phelps (2020). Such inquiry continues to develop, with some researchers insisting that quantitative studies are necessary to discern how measurable and reliable such effects are for wide-scale implementation (see Lieberoth and Trier-Knudsen (2015)). Regardless, it is evident that role-playing is seen by many scholars and practitioners alike as a potentially powerful tool to inspire change in people.

The possibility for transformation can be examined in terms of the interpersonal function of role-playing during gameplay as well as related engagements. Role-playing games, as social activities, have the potential to form communal groups of players – for an individual game and for role-playing as an activity in general, see Lukka (2022). When individuals have experiences within these groups - both in-game and off-game - that they consider transformative and feel safe engaging in such experiences due to the social support structures provided, such groups can be considered transformational communities.

Building upon previous considerations of transformative role-play (see Bowman and Hugaas (2019; 2021)), the goal of this paper is to provide an overview of a theoretical framework for understanding what a transformational community is, how immersive experiences can afford transformative impacts for participants in such a community, and how role-playing communities can maximize these benefits while minimizing pitfalls. Applying theoretical perspectives from psychoanalysis, social psychology, sociology, and group relations, we will discuss the importance of creating and reinforcing a sufficiently supportive *container* for these communities, within which processes of personal transformation can occur. The term *container*

according Bion (2013) is commonly-used vernacular in many personal development, group relations, and neo-spiritual communities today. It refers to a holding environment, as Winnicott (1960) that is established between the group and its leadership, who together hold sufficient authority and responsibility to establish and maintain the trust of participants. Building upon Green and Molenkamp (2005), we will argue that a *transformational* container should be secure enough to:

● Contain participants's experience in a way that feels sufficiently bounded;
● Focus upon the intentionality of the task;
● Maintain the values and norms collectively agreed upon by the group;
● Respond to the evolving needs of the group;
● Support any shifts in personality, behavior, and dynamics that unfold, including expressions of selfhood that feel authentic for participants;
● Support some degree of playfulness with identity, social organization, and paradigm;
● Provide positive reinforcement when participants engage in difficult cognitive and emotional processes;
● Establish clear boundaries that benefit everyone when the process becomes difficult, messy, or when transgressions occur.

Additionally, the article will discuss the nature of consensus reality as a force that can suppress forms of identity expression that individuals find authentic and how play can inspire agency for individuals within it. We discuss how analog role-playing games such as live action role-playing (larp) and tabletop games can provide *transformational containers* for individuals to explore new ways of being, relating, and enacting beliefs within the small bubble of their community, while taking place within the wider collective consciousness.

This framework further describes such containers through the metaphor of alchemy, in which processes ignite that must be sufficiently held by the group in order to complete the process of transformation while maintaining perceptions of safety. Borrowing language from personal development groups, we describe such processes in terms of *expansion* and *contraction*, both of which are necessary for transformation to occur. We also discuss the social risks involved with non-normative forms of self-expression, as well as risks specific to role-playing environments in terms of ways in which safety can be compromised or challenged. Thus, this article will emphasize maximizing the benefits while minimizing pitfalls of such an environment. Throughout the article, we compare these affordances to similar groups processes such as drag and queer performance spaces, within which participants can often express more authentic senses of self with regard to gender. Finally, we discuss how the larp we are designing, *Euphoria*, can combine the agency to explore and express non-normative genders afforded by queers spaces with the magic circle provided by a role-playing game as a potentially transformational container. We especially highlight the importance of integration practices for solidifying lasting change after the conclusion of a role-playing event within transformational communities.

2 Containers: holding environments for transformation

The concepts of *containers* and *holding environments* arise from psychoanalysts Wilfred Bion (1897-1979) and D. W. Winnicott (1896-1971). These foundational theorists in the field of developmental psychology and group dynamics focus upon the experiences of infancy and how the human mind develops into adulthood as a result. They highlight experiences the infant has with their caregiver in which they feel *held*. This holding is not only physical, but also emotional and mental. It involves the caregiver providing a

sense of security such that the child feels their basic needs are met in the moment and that they have no need for anxiety due to threats to survival, as Winnicott (1960). The caregiver is not only present physically, but also becomes *attuned* to the child in such a way that the child feels that their caregiver is alert, responsive, and comforting. As a result, the child and caregiver may experience a sense of *reverie*, where they feel safe enough to surrender into the experience of connection with one another. Within *reverie*, the child can express sensations, feelings, or thoughts that are incomprehensible and overwhelming and the caregiver can respond with support, in effect "containing" these confusing experiences and reflecting them back in a way that is reassuring to the child, according Riesenberg-Malcolm (2009). This process allows the child to release their sense of hyper-vigilance as they experience a sense of nurturance and safety from harm. It also allows the child to process their own experience as reflected back to them through the mirror of the caregiver, whose consciousness and comprehension of reality is more developed. When vigilance is relaxed and the child can experience this form of *surrender*, Winnicott believed they could feel free to play, which he thought was a vital component to the development of a child's expression of their sense of self.

Note that surrender here is distinct from submission; the child does not relinquish their autonomy or sense of free will. According to Winnicott (1971), when children are able to play, they can project their fantasies onto the world by imagining that they are omnipotent. They can imagine that they themselves "created" the conditions that bring pleasure, rather than fulfillment being provided by something external to them. In this stage, the child and their environment are one, and this illusion of omnipotence reinforces the child's sense of agency. This stage is similar to what Jacques Lacan (2001) calls the imaginary order, which precedes the symbolic -- or

mirror stage of development -- when separateness becomes apparent, and thus both the elation of individualism, but also disempowerment pervades. The process of accepting that normative *social* reality and physical *brute* reality exist and often do not respond to our subjective desires can be traumatic for a child: e.g., realizing that the child does not "create" their own sustenance through wishful thinking, and later, learning that we all must die, that Santa Claus is not real, etc. Projecting fantasy upon a *transitional object* – which may be a physical object, an imagining, a sound, a song, or some other creation of the child – is a way to preserve the illusion of omnipotence and transition into accepting the harsh realities of the external social and physical world, i.e extending the imaginary stage through pretense. For Winnicott (1971), this projective illusory state is playful – meaning it straddles a line between fantasy and reality. He believed this sort of imaginal play is necessary for the child to feel supported in developing a self-concept that feels authentic over time.

Sadly, the caregiver's job is, in part, to dispel these illusions for the child, informing them of the nature of social and physical reality. To socialize the child, caregivers must correct the child's imaginings and enforce conformity, which often means highlighting the child's lack of omnipotence and agency to change much about their environment. George Herbert Mead (1967) described this process as the development of the sense of self through the comprehension of this identity as a part of an established society with certain norms. In psychoanalytic terms, this process also includes the internalization of those social structures and their impact on the sense of self through the formation of the *superego*, or inner Censor, according Freud (1990; 2013).

Winnicott believed that this painful process of socialization best unfolds when the child still feels held, still experiences attunement with the parent,

and is permitted to retain their playfulness in order to explore their sense of self. He suggested that a parent need not be perfect in this regard: that they simply needed to be *good enough* at their ability to establish the holding environment for the child. In instances where one's environment does not feel sufficiently held, the child is not able to drop their vigilance and express this authentic-feeling sense of self. Instead, they must remain hyper-aware of their environment and create a false self, as Winnicott (1960), searching for ways to respond to the external world in order to get their needs met and address survival concerns. For example, if a caregiver is negligent, abusive, authoritarian, or otherwise unsupportive in some way, the child is not able to experience playful expression. Instead, they must adopt a false self that is responsive and adaptive to those pressures, a pattern that once learned often repeats in adult life, according Berne (1996). Such a response is an act of *submission,*[1] which is in direct contrast to the sort of surrendered joy one can experience through playfulness. Playful experiences were also studied by attachment theorists like Mary Ainsworth (with S.M. Bell (1970)) and John Bowlby (1988), who observed that in development, if the caregiver is available and responsive in a supportive consistent manner, then the child will feel secure enough to explore and interact socially and environmentally.

Winnicott believed that these patterns extended into adulthood as well. The abilities to imagine, play, create, and project one's fantasies upon reality are responsible for artistic creations, as well as the evolution of one's own sense of identity. If the environment within which a person exists does not sufficiently hold space for such playful imaginings, the individual is forced to

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[1] Submission here differs from the use of submission in the kink community, which is a form of consensual role-playing between participants where they agree that one party will exert control and the other will submit, see Harviainen (2011); Sihvonen and Harviainen (2020)). However the state of *sub space* described by kink participants is more akin to *surrender* in this formulation, as the container feels secure enough for them to relax vigilance.

conform, which reinforces the false self. If they fail to conform, unconsciously they may fear facing censure, ostracization, or even death. Whether these consequences are real or imagined makes little difference, as the mind reacts as if in a state of danger, often suppressing the authentic self (or selves) or even forgetting they exist at all. These coping mechanisms help people to avoid the pain of the discordance of knowing one is not able to express themselves fully and be accepted. They may overcompensate by clinging to the false self and overperforming it, e.g. a queer adolescent performing straightness to avoid being outed. Alternatively, they may take part in playful activities in secret, holding internalized shame around these behaviors, e.g. young adults who secretly play *Dungeons & Dragons* as a "guilty pleasure."

In contrast, when the holding environments within which human development unfolds are supportive of playful creativity, a person's sense of authentic self can emerge and evolve through expression and interaction. Group holding environments can be created that support playfulness and surrender within the setting of bounded containment. Just as a parent may take a child on a "playdate" with other children or a teacher may oversee playful activities at recess in between classes, adults can establish playful environments within which participants' creativity can emerge. Examples of such playful spaces for adults include drag shows, kink parties, Burning Man events, music festivals, improvisational theatre classes, conventions, cosplay events, etc.

From this perspective, many role-playing groups have the implicit goal of establishing such an environment, particularly communities that encourage creative expression, projective imagination onto the world, and exploration of identities outside of one's prescribed social roles. The container of a role-playing group is bounded and held by the facilitators, inviting participants to surrender their vigilance and engage in spontaneous expression. That the

experience is "only a game" provides the *alibi* that participants may require to escape the normative social rules that might otherwise preclude them "playing" with roles in this way (see Deterding (2017)), Some may find the concept of adopting a fictional role within a game as paradoxical to expressing one's "authentic" self. However, from Winnicott's perspective, this sort of playful creation can be experienced as more authentic than adopting a role to adapt to normative social conventions or to avoid disturbing the status quo.

Due to this tension, the notion of an "authentic" or "inherent" self cannot be isolated from the impact of social or cultural influences. However, this dialectic does not negate the possibility of an authentic self-concept existing. We locate the current work in developmental and ecological psychology that argues that the apparent self is a function of both an inherent self and the impacts of society upon that individual, producing a self-concept that is always responding to the external world and negotiating agency within it. From this perspective, whether an inherent self *is* authentic or *is perceived to be* authentic matters little. What matters is that suppression of one's authentic self-expression can lead to harmful psychological outcomes -- outcomes that playfulness supported by transformational containers potentially can ameliorate.

For example, as a trans person, Baird understands implicitly the challenge often leveled at trans and queer people regarding this sense of authentic self by a world that insists that our perceptions of selfhood are false (see Serano (2007)). Rejecting a person's claim on their authentic sense of self is tantamount to rejecting their autonomy, agency, and legitimacy as a social actor and human being with inherent value and rights. Thus, understanding that the authentic self is in part influenced by the communities within which we exist is an integral function of the transformative approach for which we are advocating. Furthermore, as the sense of self is impacted

upon by our environment and in part formed through discursive interaction (see Foucault (1969); Butler (1990)) and social performance, as Goffman (1956), it is not only a site for oppression from outside constraints; it is also open to positive transformation and expression within alternative social containers.

Indeed, many role-players state that they feel more authentically expressed and are able to discover aspects of their "true" identities while interacting within the fictional framework of a game, accordin to Bowman (2010); Moriarity (2019); Baird (2021); Diakolambrianou, Baird, Westborg, and Bowman (2021). However, the opposite may be true without this conscious holding practice. Larp as a memetic medium, like any social activity, can easily reproduce the normativities that constrain behavior in wider society, e.g., gender and sexuality norms, as Cazeneuve (2018). Thus, a role-playing container is not inherently transformational in terms of affirming a person's exploration of their authentic self; the group must hold space for such explorations and validate the social identities that emerge from them, according Stets and Serpe (2013).

3 The tyranny of consensus reality

Physical, objective reality is not the only disillusioning force that the creative mind must reconcile. The child is slowly indoctrinated by caregivers, peers, and education systems into what is colloquially called *consensus reality* (see Splane (2004)). The consensus reality is a shared collective understanding of what is real and what is false. While some sociological theory, such as Durkheim's (2019) theory of social solidarity focusing upon the stabilizing structure that consensus provides, other theorists view the imposition of consensus as a source of conflict between the marginalized individual and mainstream groups, according Bernard (1983). This article will

hold the position that both are true depending upon the circumstances, positing that consensus and conflict exist in dynamic tension with one another and may inform one another's development.

Additionally, consensus reality is not always uniform; since each person lives in a state of subjectivity and is part of multiple groups that may or may not adhere to the same shared values or practices, consensus reality may be in flux at times for each person. However, consensus reality remains a force -- or, more precisely, a set of forces -- that consistently requires the individual to adopt their logic and adapt to the beliefs inherent to that logic. For instance, if the young child in Winnicott's example experiences themself as able to perform acts of magic and the consensus reality does not support such acts as possible, the child may experience the caregivers enforcing consensus reality as a force of consistent disillusionment. The act of dispelling the perceived agency of the child's subjectivity is inherently disempowering, as the child learns the limits of their own perceptions and their influence upon reality. Indeed, many social structures reinforce such disempowering beliefs as central tenets in order to subjugate the will of the individual and subordinate it to the group through conformity. From this perspective, despite the term, adopting consensus reality cannot be viewed as a truly *consensual* act that takes part between willing, conscious participants, but rather a process of indoctrination and social control.

Thus, play becomes important psychologically for the development of the child. It permits children to adopt consensus reality and integrate into society while still experiencing a sense of magic, wonderment, and empowerment over some measure of their environment. When play is permitted and encouraged, the child can explore their identity, express important aspects of their consciousness, and make sense of their social relationships, according to Bowman (2010); Stenros (2015); Bowman and

Lieberoth (2018). When play is discouraged, heavily regulated, or punished, the child may experience consensus reality as a tyrannical force that is imposed upon them from the outside world without their consent. In effect, the child develops their identity in a dialectical relationship with both brute reality -- the physical -- and consensus reality, the social.

For survival, many people settle into conformity and submit to consensus reality, thereby enforcing it upon others or attempting to uphold it for those around them as they mature. Judith Butler (1990; 1993) argues that this process is precisely how gender is established and re-affirmed through constant discursive reiteration, which requires all individuals in a given society to adopt and reproduce those normativities, a framework she calls the *heterosexual matrix*. This process forces anyone who cannot conform to gender normativities to unconsciously or consciously adopt the discursive performance of "compulsory heterosexuality" (BUTLER, 1990, p 22-23), i.e. to be "in the closet."

Alternatively, identities might develop in opposition or negotiation with consensus reality. For example, if a child still wishes to engage in imaginative pursuits or magical belief systems, they may have to take such activities "underground," hiding them from certain social groups to avoid censure. If the punishment for such imaginative pursuits is severe -- for example, in a highly religious community where beliefs are tightly regulated and enforced -- a person may experience profound alienation, anger, depression, or even suicidality as the result of the suppression of beliefs and activities that feel more authentic and empowering to them. They may develop the false self that Winnicott describes, outwardly performing the role required by society, but inwardly feeling lost. Or, they may choose to express their more authentic self and face consequences from the outside world, which further subjects them

to the trauma of oppression and rejection -- an all too common experience for those who break, for example, gender normativities.

For theorists like Galtung (1990), the imposition of any one belief system on a child is a form of *cultural violence*, the impacts of which can only be ameliorated by exposing the child to multiple perspectives and cultural systems and giving them options to pursue based upon their own interests. Similarly, we can view the development of the personality either as a site for violence, where the caregiver informs the child of who they should or shall be, or a site for exploration, where the caregiver allows the child to playfully co-create their identity within the bounds of social reality.

By understanding the social costs individuals can incur through challenging the dominant narratives imposed by the consensus, one can understand why people may choose conformity and suppression of their creative impulses in order to retain their sense of place in society, especially if they experience or witness severe censure and consequences for transgressive behaviors. In these cases, in order for participants to feel secure enough to engage, often the act of play must be condoned by society in some significant way, such as "serious" creative endeavors in the arts that are supported as cultural contributions. Thus, such endeavors are further subject to the tyranny of consensus reality, as the "right" way to create or perform is heavily regulated by standards dictated by artistic, entertainment, and academic institutions. While such endeavors can produce masterpieces of creative excellence, they send the message that play must be productive, executed within established cultural frames, and in service to the collective in order to be valuable. Consequently, play that is considered amateurish, "poorly" executed, or experienced for one's own pleasure rather than to produce a product for others is frowned upon, openly castigated as escapist, or even deemed dangerous.

This tendency can sometimes be seen in the distinction of "high" and "low" art. Drag and queer performance and venues, for example, are often characterised as "low art" in this way; yet, we will argue such performance spaces provide a model for some of the ways in which adults can explore a more authentic sense of self in transformational communities, despite the amount of value that is ascribed to the activity by the wider society.

This notion of what is considered "acceptable" art, however, is not immutable. Drag performance has seen a significant increase in representation in mainstream media, which may by impacting its apparent social validity (see Mccormack and Wignall (2021)). Queer experiences are currently featured more widely than ever in popular culture, e.g., in the world-wide phenomenon of *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-) and its impressive number of spinoffs globally, as well as documentaries such as *We're Here* (2020-) on HBO and *Queer Eye* (2018-) on Netflix, all of which have been either nominated for, or won, Emmys in recent years. However, while a sort of mainstreaming of queer culture may be unfolding, anti-queer legislation and other forms of behavioral policing are similarly on the rise as an effort to quell the legitimizing of queer forms of self-expression (see Pearce, Erikainen and Vincent (2020)).

Similarly, role-playing games, on the whole, historically have not been created for "productive" purposes insofar as they are mostly an amateur activity with a *first-person audience*: one that is produced for the aesthetic and emotional enjoyment of the participants, not the society at large, according Sandberg (2004); Macdonald (2013) e Stenros (2014). Even with the meteoric rise in popularity of streaming shows such as *Critical Role* (2015), where professional actors play *Dungeons & Dragons* and other games in front of an audience, according to Jones (2021) e Lasley (2021), such performances, again, are financially motivated and thus considered more

legitimate than more amateur forms of play. While some role-playing is tolerated or condoned by certain social groups as useful, such as psychodrama, training simulations, educational larps, or Nordic larps with specific artistic or political agendas, such examples are rare compared with the widespread use of so-called "hobbyist" role-players. The impetus toward "productive" role-playing imposes the above-mentioned process of subjecting creativity to the constraints that are valued by the consensus.

These forms of play produce outcomes that may not be predictable, but are considered useful to society as a whole, at least within certain groups, e.g. the experiential learning movement. However, they may also enforce constraints upon what "serious play" looks like and what its goals are, removing much of the creative exploration that enables an individual to explore themselves more fully. These types of role-playing are naturally of interest to the topic of transformation insofar as they are deployed with the intent of having a certain impact upon the participants, often with one or more stated outcomes. However, to reduce transformational play to only these activities would be to reinforce the notion that more free, creative play is "leisurely," and, therefore, not valuable. Bowman's research has found quite the opposite: players often report transformative impacts from traditional role-playing games that were not produced with such intent, as Bowman (2010). Edmund Y. Chang (2017) and Bo Ruberg (2017; 2019) note that when engaging with mainstream "leisure" games with no apparent queer content, queer players will apply readings and understandings that more align with their subjectivities. Given this, Baird (2021) has argued that mainstream games not intentionally designed for gender play might still provide some opportunities for transformative experiences when exploring gender expression.

Thus, we argue that we should not consider "serious" game spaces more inherently transformational as containers than more "playful" atmospheres. Rather, we find it more accurate to say that any container that holds space for play offers an environment of potentiality within which a person may further explore themselves and the world around them. Furthermore, we argue against assuming that role-playing spaces do not reinforce consensus reality simply because play is condoned. It is more accurate to say that they provide a frame that allows for different rules of reality to exist, as Goffman (1956; 1986) and a social stage where players have alibi to present different identities, according to Pohjola (2004), Montola and Holopainen (2012) and Deterding (2017). How play unfolds varies from case to case, some play may replicate social structures that exist in the outside world and reinforce aspects of the consensus reality such as social hierarchies, as Algayres (2019). And, racism, as Trammell (2018); sexism, according Trammell (2014), and Trammell and Crenshaw (2021); homophobia, as Stenros and Sihvonen (2015) and Stenros and Sihvonen (2019); colonialism, according Premont and Heine (2021), and even fascism. Play in itself is a neutral act according to Stenros (2015), however, we can shape play to support progressive goals and ideologies memetically bleeding-in, as Hugaas (2019), such as game environments that support non-normative gender expression and exploration, according Baird (2021; 2022).

Thus, in order to maximize the potential for role-playing games as transformational containers, designers, facilitators, and participants should strive toward greater awareness and intentionality in their play. Whether creating games with an explicit purpose in mind or creating more open spaces of exploration, all participants should strive to remain conscious of the aspects of the consensus reality that they bring into the space, whether consciously or unconsciously. Many games feature experiences of oppression as part of

the design, such as in many Nordic larps (see Stenros and Montola (2010), but care is often taken by organizers to create frames around such play that counter the insidious effects of indoctrination. For example, in *Halat Hisar* (2013), a larp about occupation, the organizers thoroughly contextualized such oppression as harmful in preparatory materials and workshops. The organizers also created space to allow players the experience of holding during their emotional process through structured forms of debriefing or other forms of expression, comfort, and connection after the larp ended. This larp experience produced an affect in many participants that led to greater empathy and solidarity for people under occupation, according to Pöllänen and Arjoranta (2021). Similarly, the larp *Just a Little Lovin'*, about the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s, which has been run several times in the last decade and is often called transformative by players, can both help players explore non-normative sexualities through characters, as well as increase an experience of affect that can help players better empathize with people affected by the virus, according Groth, Grasmo and Edland (2021).

When framed intentionally, such experiences have more potential for transformation in that the structure is designed with the intention for education, emotional catharsis, increased awareness of social issues, and deep reflection. While such effects are also possible in so-called "leisure" games, we posit that framing and intentionality is essential for holding a transformational space where *all participants* are consenting to the possibility of experiencing a change in their perspective, awareness, or even lives moving forward, according to Bowman and Hugaas (2019; 2021).

4 The potentiality of collective consciousness

As a counterpoint to the rigid consensus reality as we have presented it, we would like to explore the notion of *collective consciousness*, which forms a basis upon which culture, beliefs, and values are reinforced and disseminated within social groups (see Durkheim (1964)). To provide concrete examples, consensus reality might insist, "There are two genders: boys and girls"; ideas within the collective consciousness might emphasize more value-driven statements such as, "It is important to maintain the gender binary to preserve the fabric of families in society," or alternatively, "It is important to respect a wide spectrum of gender identities to value individual autonomy." Thus, like with consensus reality, while it is tempting to think of collective consciousness as a monolithic force, different ideologies can emerge within the collective and be held within it, whether peacefully or in dialectic tension.

Regardless of how unified the collective consciousness might be, Durkheim believed that it was crucial for the development, support, and maintenance of social groups. While collective consciousness is also a force to which people must adhere in order to be accepted into the group, for our purposes, it is more fluid conceptually than consensus reality. Collective consciousness not only contains valued cultural systems that have been passed down through traditions, but it also holds the new emergences in memetic thought that are responsible for social movements that can lead to progress and cultural evolution. Antonio Gramsci (1995) thought that the collective consciousness contained both the hegemony of mainstream culture and the experiences of those placed within the margins. If such marginalized individuals could group together and organize, from that very space of marginalization, revolutionary new ways of thinking, being, and grouping could emerge.

In recent years, the paradigms that form (and are formed by) the collective consciousness have been shown to be fragile, especially due to the

information warfare currently occurring on social media, news outlets, etc. As a result, consensus reality has become so fragmented that people within the same social group can no longer assume they adhere to the same basic givens: whether a virus is real or fake, whether a president has been legally elected or not, whether a vaccine is harmful or helpful, whether climate change is real or a lie, etc. Such fractures threaten the stability of a society, as members of the group cannot be assumed to be operating under the same social contract or perceive actions in a similar enough way to be considered part of the same shared reality. This fragility also lays bare how constructed consensus reality is, which can lead to greater conformity and rigidity of belief out of fear; a deep sense of existential alienation; or even an expansion of worldview, as previous assumptions are allowed to fall away in favor of more liberating notions. While the latter may seem the most appealing, it is the most risky in many ways, as it requires openly challenging the status quo and choosing to live in a manner that is oppositional to one or more consensus realities. Especially with the advent and proliferation of the Internet, finding others who adhere to the same beliefs, and are thus sharing the same collective consciousness, is far easier than in the past, leading to bubbles of social consciousness that may find conflict in interaction. Additionally, adopting a new ideology that is more liberating does not necessarily mean that paradigm is inherently democratic or inclusive; people may suppress the rights of others or engage in acts of verbal abuse under the guise of "freedom of speech." Thus, when we discuss working within the collective consciousness, we support an inherently progressive view with regard to beliefs, i.e. supporting the use of play as a means to create greater alignment with one's sense of authentic self and purpose, while also increasing peace, justice, and empowerment for individuals and groups in society as a whole.

Furthermore, collective consciousness can shift over time, as it is also a dynamic and dialectical space that can both enforce groupthink or support change within communities. While groupthink and conformity can have disastrous consequences to freedom and human rights, according to Jung (1964), shifts in groupthink toward progressive ideals of peace and justice can also become instruments of social change, especially when they result in wide scale movements. We suggest that this tension is present within all communities to greater and lesser degrees. Just as the child has to reconcile their own subjective desires and imaginings with brute reality, individuals within groups have to reconcile their authentic expression in the face of the conformity of the collective. An individual experiencing alienation from the collective is often at great risk of ostracization from the group unless they exhibit signs of conformity, even within communities that espouse a progressive collective consciousness.

Alternatively, if enough people who find commiseration with one another in their sense of alienation bond together in groups, they can shift the collective consciousness of their smaller community, which can have impacts on the larger group as a whole. Such community restructuring is prevalent in many marginalized communities. One example is the establishment of alternative queer kinship dynamics in the form of "found families," which historically resulted from the high prevalence of queer people being ostracized by their birth families. a phenomenon receiving increasing attention in recent research (see Björklund and Dahl (2019)).

In particular, when groups are formed that value creative expression and are supportive of exploration of more authentic forms of identity, they have the potential to impact not only individual lives in a profound way, but also the collective. They provide a sense of belonging and a holding environment within which individuals can explore identities that feel more

accurate to their inner states, while also creating pockets of social reality that are based upon ideologies and values that may challenge those of the mainstream collective. While individuals within such groups may experience stigma from the broader society for participation within them, if these countercultures are tolerated and permitted to exist, they transition to a subcultural status: that is to say, they remain within the umbrella of the overculture and thus retain their relationship to it. In this way, they may influence it to lesser degrees -- such as the growing tolerance and even valorization of "geek" culture within society -- or to greater degrees -- such as social movements that promote progressive political change. This notion is supported by the philosophy of *conflict transformation*, according Lederach (2003), whereby conflicts within society are not seen as inevitably leading to violence or oppression, but can be viewed as opportunity spaces to envision positive change. In conflict transformation, imagination, co-creation, and creativity are essential parts of the process, as individuals work collaboratively in order to build change processes, worldviews, and attitudes toward conflict that are beneficial to everyone involved.

From this perspective, one can view the process of role-playing as a space of potentiality that is not only valuable, but vital to the growth of participants and their communities. If individuals consistently struggle with expressing a sense of authenticity and vulnerability within a social reality that can feel oppressive, providing a container within which they can play functions in the same way as did the holding environment of the caregiver's metaphorical or literal arms. This container can permit individuals to relax their enforced social roles, adopt new ones, co-create, and discover new ways of understanding and presenting themselves: as Pohjola (2004) calls them, Temporary Autonomous Identities. These identities can have an emancipatory impact upon one's experience of themselves, particularly for individuals who

feel marginalized by society, according Kemper (2017; 2020) and Baird (2021). It can offer Temporary Autonomous Zones, as Bey (1985), where alibi to behave in non-normative ways is permitted, collective intentionality is projected upon brute reality, and new meanings are co-created, according to Poremba (2007), Montola (2012), e Montola and Holopainen (2012). Within these containers, players can explore existing social dynamics and systems or create new ones that may be more optimal. When reinforced by communities of play who value creativity, this endeavor can establish lasting social groups that support consistent playfulness -- playfulness that can lead to changes in the individual's behavior and self-presentation in other social spaces such as work and family. In short, such spaces can become holding environments for transformation.

5 Transformation and alchemy

Many personal development groups refer to the process of transformation work as *alchemical*, likely influenced by the application of principles of alchemy to psychological development by thinkers like Jung (1976). In this alchemical metaphor, the container holds the process by which one or more elements can be exposed to others, which will create a reaction that can, by its very nature, be explosive. If the container is sufficient in holding this process without cracking or dissolving altogether, a transformation involving a fundamental change from one state to another is able to transpire in relative safety. Another metaphor for this process is the cocoon state within which a caterpillar is held when transforming into a butterfly, according Hugaas and Bowman (2019). If the cocoon is ruptured in some way, it cannot contain the process and the transformation is not possible to complete.

Also implied in the alchemical metaphor is that this transformation is from a less desirable state to one that is more desirable, i.e. turning the "lead" of the previous self into the "gold" of the more authentic self. Thus, transformational containers are not created merely to hold space for the transition from one socially-recognized and codified state to another, according Turner (1969), nor do they refer to spaces in which a person or group permanently deteriorates from a more desirable state to a less optimal one. They are held with a clear intention of radical improvement, development, or evolution on the part of all participants. While not all participants are guaranteed to have a minor or major transformation in their lives as a result of this process, they have ostensibly opted-in to these goals and values by virtue of their participation and are surrendering into the container as a space that can hold them in such a process. Clear examples of such transformational containers are therapeutic relationships between counselors and clients, weekend-long personal development seminars, meditation retreats, etc. From this perspective the transformational potential of a role-playing event depends strongly upon the ways in which the container is set, held, and reinforced by participants.

6 The challenges of facilitating transformational containers

Creating such a container may sound like a daunting task for facilitators. The leadership of such a group must create a bounded space and exert authority in ways that are both respected by participants and clear, according Green and Molenkamp (2005). According to group dynamics theory, without sufficient authority in leadership, the tasks set by the group are likely to become muddled or fall to the wayside. The leadership should feel sufficiently present and strong, as Tuckman (1965), but also hold space for creative expression on the part of the participants, lest the group become dependent on the leader and regress to conformity, according Bion (2013). Leadership should also maintain integrity in exhibiting the values explicated in the group container and remain open to critique, displaying accountability and willingness to adapt to the needs of the group.

Regardless of whether leadership structures are hierarchical or more evenly dispersed among the group, if the leadership fails in one or more of these areas, they may become challenged by the group with the demands that another leader step up who can sufficiently maintain the container. This phase of group development is referred to as *Storming*, which is often considered a crucial step in the evolution of a community, according to Tuckman (1965), Bowman (2013), and Leonard and Arango (2013). If this stage is not sufficiently navigated, the group may dissolve completely, split into factions, or resort to authoritarian forms of control in which input from group members is no longer supported and conformity is enforced. Role-playing communities are especially prone to storming phases due to their emphasis on co-creation, agency, and play with roles and hierarchies. While status hierarchies still exist and are often recreated within groups due to social and cultural capital which may limit an individual's creativity, according

Dashiell (2017) and Algayres (2019). Paradoxically, players within the group also are able to push the boundaries of self-expression and, in some cases, challenge the "reality" of the game as established by the facilitators, according Bowman (2013) and Dashiell (2020). Role-playing game facilitators may have no formal training in leadership and may either resort to authoritarian forms of leadership or more ad hoc organizational styles where leadership responsibilities are dispersed among members, according Harviainen (2013). When leadership is not clearly established, imbued with sufficient authority, and sustained through times of storm, role-playing groups can become unstable as alchemical containers.

Other threats to the stability of these group containers can occur when participants begin to feel unsafe around other participants or within the community as a whole. Players may become triggered by game content or by player behavior and not feel supported by the group when they experience a trauma response, according Brown (2014) or a decrease in enjoyment, an especially prevalent issue for players from marginalized backgrounds, according to Holkar (2016), and Kemper, Saitta and Koljonen (2020). For example, queer players may want to express non-normative genders or sexualities, but feel unsupported by individuals within the community, as Stenros and Sihvonen (2019). Preferences for a particular creative agenda or types of play can become dogmatic, wielded by players as a form of boundary control, according Bowman (2013) and Dashiell (2017; 2020). Repeated and insistent boundary pushing either within or outside the magic circle of play can feel like a violation of player or organizer consent. The lowering of vigilance involved in relaxing into a state of play can leave participants more prone to predatory behavior on the part of bad actors within the group, according Brown (2017). Participants can become disillusioned when issues of inclusion, diversity, and accessibility make some individuals feel more

welcome in the container than others, in accordance with George (2104), Kemper (2018), and Davis,[2] Cook, and Foxworthy (2018). In short, a role-playing group is not inherently transformational as we are theorizing here -- it requires work on the part of all participants to reinforce the support structure of the alchemical container.

When conflicts among group members are not adequately addressed, resolved, or transformed by creating a win-win scenario and a clear path forward, the community can become toxic. Toxicity often takes the form of ongoing public disputes between individuals or factions on social media, which can rupture group cohesion and collectively traumatize the group, sometimes leading to schisms within the community, as Bowman (2013). In some cases, unresolved *bleed* can escalate these disputes, when players have not thoroughly processed and integrated their experiences within the group container or do not feel sufficiently held in their experience. Bleed refers to the experience of when contents of play within games may spillover into their daily frame of reality, in accordance with Bowman (2013), and Leonard and Thurman (2018), including ego structures, in accordance with Beltrán (2012; 2013); physical habits, emotional states, and ideological structures, as Hugaas (2019). This notion of bleed can be foundational to transformational play, in that it allows for experiences from within a game to bleed-out into the reality of everyday life in a positive way, including in potentially emancipatory ways for individuals from marginalized backgrounds, according to Kemper (2017; 2020). However, in order for such bleed to occur and to become a positive experience, it needs to be considered in the design and implementation process of the larp and be well-bounded within functional transformative communities.

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[2] Now known as Yeonsoo Julian Kim.

If these conditions are not met, unresolved conflicts can lead to an even more profound experience of alienation for participants, as an environment into which they once felt that they could surrender and self-express becomes a space of hypervigilance and mistrust, i.e. antipathy, in accordance with Leonard and Thurman (2018). Ultimately, while players may disagree upon the degree to which safety culture should pervade role-playing groups, according Algayres (2019), these containers must feel "good enough" as holding environments in order for players to have the experience of feeling safe. Otherwise, the process of transformation may become interrupted, like the rupturing of a cocoon before a butterfly fully forms. While experiences of trauma, betrayal, and disillusionment can sometimes lead to other forms of transformation and healing, these instances run counter to the goals of security, creativity, and play, and thus should be ameliorated when possible.

7 Reinforcing transformational containers

Within all role-playing environments, the depth of self-exploration within these spaces relies upon the off-game and in-game maintenance of the container over time in order to support its holding function. In other words, players must continue to feel safe enough to surrender, which requires conscientious, mindful, and responsive holding by facilitators. For example, larp organizers might run workshops or debriefs; establish clear safety rules; encourage calibration; and make clear the optional nature of the activity, according Bowman (2014b; 2017b), Koljonen (2016) and Brown (2018). Tabletop facilitators might hold a *Session 0* where the group agrees upon which content is desirable and which content should be avoided, ways to check-in with one another e.g., using consent mechanics etc., in accordance with Stavropoulos (n. d.), and Reynolds and Germain (2019). These practices are most helpful when reinforced over time through reiteration of the group

values of the collective consciousness, e.g. "Players are more important than games," and behavioral modeling, e.g., using safety mechanics in play.

Without consistent reinforcement from both facilitators and participants, the container can become unstable. When participants engage in play, the surrender involved allows them to explore their *growing edges*: those spaces within which they can challenge themselves to step outside the comfort zone of their normative roles, take risks, and self-express in ways that might otherwise feel transgressive. When engaging in risky behavior, players might harm or offend others, as Stenros (2015); push themselves past their limits emotionally or physically, according Leonard and Thurman (2018); become triggered or otherwise overwhelmed, as Brown (2014). The container must be robust enough to hold these experiences and responsive enough to reestablish the "secure enough-ness" that participants need in order to feel safe surrendering once more.

8 Intentionality and goal-setting

When considering the specific goal of using role-playing spaces as vehicles for transformation, how can participants reinforce these containers in order to facilitate more opportunities for transformative impacts? Most importantly, the intentionality of the group should be clear. Intentionality in this case refers to the establishing of shared vision and values, as well as a clear understanding of what transformational impacts are intended by the group activity, in accordanc with Bowman and Hugaas (2019). Many participants experience greater trust and focus when the goals of the group are transparent, as Torner (2013). As participants are drawn to play from different backgrounds and may have different agendas, the container is reinforced when facilitators make the group intentions clear and players take

responsibility for maintaining boundaries and steering the experience according to the shared vision.

These goals may or may not be specific. For example, in the leisure larp *Epiphany*, Russell Murdock, Rebecca Roycroft and Sarah Lynne Bowman (2017) established the space as one in which players would choose to use parts of their off-game identities, beliefs, questions, and practices in play for the purposes of encouraging personal transformation. Players could choose which aspects they most wanted to explore and which ones they wanted to avoid. Specific outcomes for participants were not established for this larp; the container functioned more as an established space for player-driven experimentation and sharing, within which some participants experienced powerful moments of realization, according Davis, Nuncio and Wong (2021).

Alternatively, in role-playing groups for adolescents and adults run by a trained professional such as those run by Game to Grow (2021), the Bodhana Group (2021), The Telos Project (2019), RPG Therapeutics (2021), and other therapists in the Take This! network (2021), the goal of developing social skills is transparent to all participants from the outset. Each individual may have a particular goal that they establish with their facilitator, such as developing impulse control, learning how to work as a team, receiving feedback, overcoming shyness, self-advocating, making friends, according to Bartenstein (2022). These individual goals may not be communicated directly with the group, as some participants may feel more exposed and less safe with that degree of transparency. For instance, in groups run for therapeutic purposes by professionals, individuals may choose not to disclose any neurodiversity diagnoses they may have received or specific traumatic events they have experienced. However, everyone agrees to take part in the activity with an explicit intention, such as developing social skills or working through

emotional blocks, with the expectation that these experiences will have a lasting impact on their interactions and faculties in everyday life.

Even with transparency, it is crucial that these goals are not imposed by the organizer or game designer, whether explicitly or secretly, e.g., "You will change your political views and behavior as a result of this larp." Often, such mandates are rejected by participants if they do not arise from an authentic desire from within the self to change or they do not follow whatever aspects emerge in play organically. Intentionality should be agreed upon by the facilitator and participants and will likely be personalized to the individual to some degree, with the understanding that, regardless of intentions, emergent play can take surprising, according to Torner (2018) and Bowman (2017b) and potentially fruitful turns. Therefore, flexibility is also required when playing for transformative impacts, particularly when aspects of the unconscious reveal themselves through play, e.g. surprisingly strong grief reactions, bleed experiences, desires for connection, etc. When considering such flexibility, facilitators can set the intention for the container itself to be transformative broadly speaking, while individuals may shift their specific personal goals based on their emergent needs at any given time.

9 Expansion and contraction

Inherent to experiences of expansion is contraction. In other words, when participants have a peak experience resulting from the altered state of consciousness of the event and feel interconnected with the group, they often feel expanded. However, when the peak experience ends and the group dissolves -- either temporarily or permanently -- confusion, alienation, insecurity, anger, or grief may arise. These sensations may emerge from unresolved bleed, such as romantic feelings, in accordance with Bowman

(2013) and Harder (2018); feelings of post-larp depression, "blues, " or *drop*; or the shock of impact when returning to daily life and the consensus reality that accompanies it, according Bowman and Torner (2014).

From a transformational perspective, the contraction is a necessary, if painful, part of the process. Thus, integration practices become important for the transformation to fully take place. The alchemical process of finding the "gold" of the experience also involves exploring what healing or change needs to occur in the first place. While some players may experience positive bleed as suggested above, others may not experience bleed at all, but may have powerful experiences nonetheless or discover profound realizations about themselves. Some participants may simply feel a sense of loss and isolation after leaving a container that felt supportive and transformational, yearning to be able to express themselves authentically once more.

Instead of considering these reactions as some sort of side effect of an otherwise potent experience, a transformational model includes these contractions as essential components to the change process that the person is undergoing. Learning how to allow the contractions to be experienced fully, including any shame or pain that arises, can help players learn to listen to the parts of themselves that need attention, care, and growth. In a transformational community, the group holds space for these reactions, providing a support network and a safety net. Concurrently, the person undergoing the contraction learns how to identify their needs and take responsibility for their emotions rather than projecting them upon others.

Thus, the relationship becomes more symbiotic rather than transactional: no one is entitled to anyone else's emotional resources, yet everyone agrees to being responsible for holding the container securely enough that players still feel held even when in states of contraction. This tension between personal and group responsibility is a feature of the

transformational container, not a bug. Each individual learns how to self-advocate, describe their needs, articulate their goals, and make requests from others; meanwhile, they learn how to set boundaries, realize their own limits, identify their available resources, and offer strength and support when possible. These skills are essential to practice, in accordance with Wood (2021), not only within a role-playing setting, but also in communities in general.

10 Integration

Extending the container beyond the play experience can not only support players who experience this contraction as a drop after games, but can also aid in the integration process. Integration involves identifying the previous state of one's experience before the game, accepting the changes that emerged from play, and finding ways to streamline these discoveries into daily life, according Teteau-Surel (2021). While integration can take many forms, it often involves players engaging in methods of processing and reflection, distilling key insights from the role-playing experiences, according Bowman and Hugaas (2019; 2021). Role-players can integrate their experiences in a variety of different ways including:

a) creative expression, e.g. journaling, telling stories to others, writing fiction, and making works of art, as Seregina (2018);

b) intellectual analysis, e.g. theorizing, reflecting, researching, and documentation;

c) emotional processing, e.g. therapy, bleed management, according Leonard and Thurman (2018); ego development, as Beltrán (2012; 2013), and debriefing, according Fatland (2013); Stark (2013) and Bowman (2014b);

d) returning to daily life, e.g. de-roling, distilling key takeaways, and self-care, according Dalstål (2016);

e) interpersonal processing, e.g. reestablishing previous social connections, negotiating relationship dynamics, and engaging in reunion activities with co-players;

f) community building, e.g. creating new communities, activism, planning events, designing games, etc.

In effect, in order for the container to be reinforced, it must be extended to include the impacts that occur outside of the magic circle of play. Players need to feel sufficiently held by the "good enough" container to be able to integrate their experiences after events. Everyone in the group shares responsibility for the maintenance of transformational containers.

11 Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that role-playing games can be held as transformational containers within which authentic co-creative expression is encouraged. We have discussed the overall issues with autonomy of expression within consensus reality, as well as the ways in which the collective consciousness can reinforce the status quo or can be altered to change it. We have discussed the ways in which such containers need to be reinforced and maintained, with a special emphasis on leadership, safety, and shared accountability.

In future work, we will implement these principles in the creation of a new larp, entitled *Euphoria*, specifically designed to allow participants to explore gender in a safer, more contained, and hopefully transformational environment, in accordance with Baird (2022). This design is inspired by the social and performance spaces that we have mentioned above which function as intuitively created transformative containers in their own rights -- drag performance spaces and queer clubs. These holding spaces offer an

alternative environment to the normative consensus reality that gender and sexuality can only be expressed in normative, binary ways. They offer a site that is playful and propose a different consensus reality where gender can be explored in alternative ways. They offer a space within which a subcultural collective consciousness is created and maintained that celebrates diversity in gender and sexuality.

Baird (2021) argues that games, including larp, feature an often unintentionally rich site for similar exploration because of the alibi of play; the opportunity to practice and explore difference (see TURKINGTON, 2016); the potentiality for insights to bleed in everyday life; and the chance to do so in safer co-created environments. Key to this larp will be the establishment of a transformational container -- a community that reflects these qualities of drag and queer performance environments while incorporating the intentional game design principals which we have outlined here.

Ultimately, while not all participants will seek to transform their lives or experience a transformative impact as a result of role-playing games, those who do need to perceive themselves as sufficiently held within the group. Greater awareness of the nuances of these psychological and social dynamics can assist in reducing toxicity within role-playing communities by providing supportive opportunities for self-exploration, personal growth, and group development based on progressive values of inclusion, consent, and support. While transformational containers such as role-playing groups cannot replace the tyranny of consensus reality or establish themselves as a "new" collective consciousness replacing the old, they can offer small bubbles of reality within which players can hold space for one another to discover authentic and co-creative ways of being and relating with one another.

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